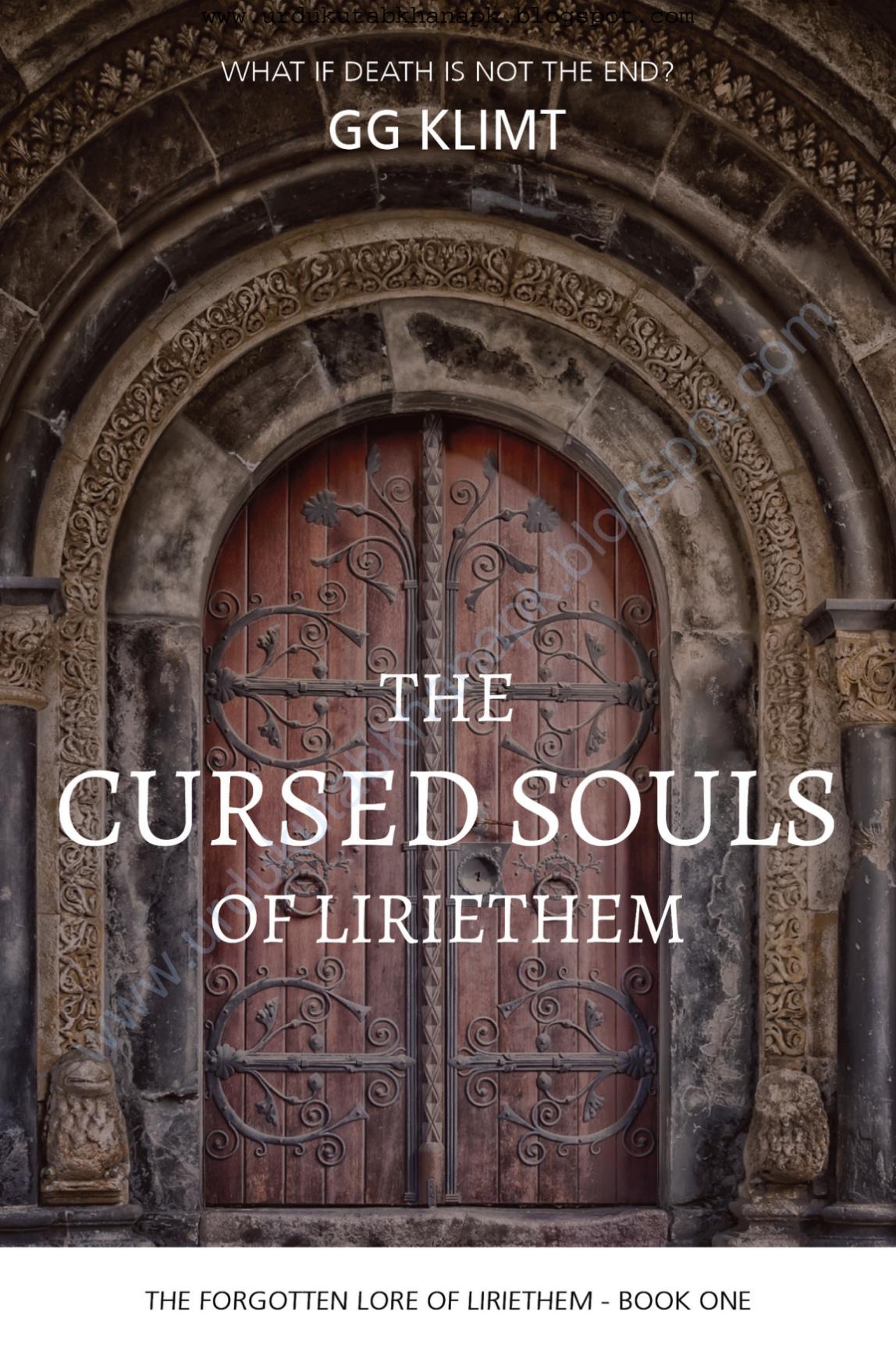


WHAT IF DEATH IS NOT THE END?

GG KLIMT



THE
CURSED SOULS
OF LIRIETHEM

THE FORGOTTEN LORE OF LIRIETHEM - BOOK ONE

GG KLIMT

The Cursed Souls of Liriethem

The Forgotten Lore of Liriethem - Volume 1

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Farewell to a great king

The procession moved slowly and with calm steps. All the people sang with sublime voices, full of harmony... although without too much feeling. The song had no words and had a sad, almost lethargic tune, very much in line with the event that was taking place: a funeral.

Most of the courtship was composed of women, except for a few eunuch men who were responsible for transporting the body. All, men and women, were young and had beautiful features. It was the royal entourage, chosen especially to perform this task: the ceremonies related to the passage of life to death of the sovereigns and the royal family of Liriethem. The servants were thirty-five in total, one for each year that the monarch had been on the throne, and all wore white silk clothes that floated with the wind, which gave the procession an otherworldly appearance. They went barefoot to prevent any noise from interfering with the harmonies of the songs.

They carried a large bundle, also wrapped in the same kind of delicate clothes: the late King Oril Liriethem III.

Great changes were now expected in all cities¹, both those belonging to the kingdom, and in foreign ones. Whoever became the new king would have a great task ahead: to maintain the unity of the kingdom of Liriethem. Oril III had been a strong king who, thanks to different political and military strategies, had led his realm to become a power in the region. With his death,

¹ The exact number of people living in the kingdom of Liriethem is unknown, but among the seven most important cities, it is believed that the number of inhabitants varies between 300,000 and 700,000.

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many neighbouring kingdoms, including a handful of rulers from several cities in Liriethem itself, saw the change of ruler as an opportunity to take a place of leadership that would allow them to follow their own ambitions.

As was customary in the long-lived kingdom of Liriethem, the late kings were to be taken to the ancient city of Liamsa. This tradition was hundreds of years old, as explained in the paintings and inscriptions at the gates of the city, made of countless dark stone arches in different states of deterioration. These murals told the story of how Liamsa had been founded and how it became a great religious capital: it had been priests who built the foundations of the city, with the aim of transforming it into a religious mecca, so that all the followers of their religion could calmly study their theological secrets². The faith of these monks was called Tilianism, a religion that is currently professed throughout the kingdom and is accepted by royalty as the official religion of Liriethem. But at the time of its greatest splendour, Liamsa was attacked and destroyed almost entirely. What can be understood in the stories told at the entrance of the city (apparently, a few survivors of the attack wanted to leave the events registered in some way before leaving the city forever, and left the messages carved in the stone arches that are still standing today) is that the population was decimated. The monks were not bellicose, they had no weapons and it was not part of their creed to attack other living beings. However, nobody knows who sacked and destroyed the city, since there is no writing about it in any library of the kingdom nor does this information appear in any of the city murals - the monks themselves probably never knew themselves who brought the ruin to their perfect city.

With the passage of time, the ruins of the city of Liamsa were completely abandoned. It was only after almost 200 years that the royal family decided to use the remains of the city for something helpful and transform them into a

² Because of the size of the city as it is seen today, it can be inferred that the number of monks who had gone to study and live in the ancient Liamsa was about 200,000, which at that time, as it does today, meant that it was an enormous city.

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great mausoleum for their royalty, a tribute to their dead kings³.

A crowd of more than five hundred Liriethems, all dressed in black, accompanied the procession in silence, but at a distance. The march kept its slow rhythm and tranquil pace. Walking in front, next to the entire royal court of Liriethem, was the widow of Oril III, Queen Irialis. She was dressed in black, with her face hidden by a dark veil, and her clothes had hundreds of details making her look distinguished even when wearing mourning colours.

As they approached the city-tomb of Liamsa, the singing ceased, one by one all in the procession went silent until only the voice was heard, a woman's. At the end of the melody, an even sadder song began, this time with words, which told the story of the life of their dead king, using many metaphors describing the events. The priestess's voice was delicate but very powerful. Everyone in the crowd could hear her song and even the city itself seemed to respond. Once they reached the edge of the city, the Liriethems stopped and let the entourage of clerics continue their march alone. The queen and the court bowed to their monarch for the last time but did not accompany the priests.

"We are all born of the goddess Tiliais and from her we will return stronger," the young priestess's song cried on several occasions, and everyone in the procession repeated in unison "and from her we will return stronger." The Goddess Tiliais was the central deity of the Tilianism⁴.

The necropolis was composed of a series of low buildings, made of stone and without a very clear order. Although the Liriethem kings of yesteryear

³ Some sources offer another explanation: the priests were expelled by the king of Liriethem ruling at the time, because of the massacres and tortures those priests organised with their followers. Years later, during the first attempt of reconstruction of Liamsa, many human bones were found in common graves. If these were part of the tilianist human sacrifices or if they were the corpses resulting of the looting of Liamsa afterwards, the truth remains, until today, unknown.

⁴ Tiliais is the name given to the Hydra in the myth of "the Hydra and the Dragon", about the creation of the world. This story gives origin to many religions, each interpreting it differently. Liriethem's royals were always followers of the so-called Tilianism, an interpretation that explains that the Hydra defeats the Dragon, making it the predominant figure in their creed. These believers affirm that they are all part of the Goddess Hydra, and that, when they die, they will be reborn stronger, like the heads of the Hydra that, when cut, two grow in its place.

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had worked for several decades to improve Liamsa's conditions, to make it a place worthy of the kings' mortal remains, the city still looked like a large collection of rubble. There were walls with large holes, lost columns in the middle of halls for no apparent purpose, and ruins everywhere. This damage is easily explained by the civil war which exploded in Liriethem just three generations of kings after the reconstruction started. The civil war, a page almost forgotten in the history of the kingdom, called by the historians "the war of the brothers", led to a great economic crisis⁵ and left both Liamsa and the kingdom of Liriethem in ruins. This situation of economic and political instability forced the king at that time, Liriato, nicknamed "the poor", to bring all the people working on Liamsa's repairs back to the capital of the kingdom to help the reconstruction works. This practise was followed by his successors and Liamsa was, again, abandoned before the works were finished. Although the custom of burying their dead kings there continued, they never returned to the original plan to restore Liamsa to the fullest.

The oldest tombs were marked by large carved stones, and those of the most recently deceased kings were in an area near the entrance of the city, in buildings with a more preserved appearance. It was there that the procession of priests with the body of Oril III was heading.

Upon arriving at a huge column with illustrations that seemed to represent ancient kings of Liriethem, an elderly priest was waiting for them. With some years more than the rest of them and with a more elaborate tunic in embroidery, also white, the man raised his voice to accompany the woman who had been singing alone since they entered Liamsa. The clergymen, now together with the older priest, continued advancing until they reached a small stone building without windows. The place was a large dark maze where only the smell of death was noticeable: they were close.

In Liamsa there was no wealth of material type, it had been conceived in

⁵ "The curse of Liamsa" is mentioned several times in books and stories. Does it start with the slaughter of the monks? Maybe for bringing dead kings to the city? Many philosophers and thinkers of Liriethem have a religious theory, which explains that the deity Tiliais, which the monks revered, left a curse in their blood, and which, once shed, fell on the city. This argument is used to explain almost all the strange phenomena that occurred in the city.

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this way by the kings of Liriethem of yesteryear who transformed the ruins into a cemetery, so that no thief or grave robber would be tempted to enter the city and disturb its inhabitants: after a lifelong service to the kingdom, the kings of Liriethem could finally rest in peace. Forgetfulness and subsequent abandonment of the city only reinforced this first idea. In addition, the entry to Liamsa was prohibited to anyone who was not a member of the Tilianism. For this reason, Queen Irialis, the court and the citizens of the city of Liriethem only accompanied the entourage of priests until the entrance of the city, being themselves just believers. And, thanks to all the stories of ghosts, spirits and other curses that were told among the inhabitants of Liriethem, few people approached it anyway. However, there was always some foreigner, ignorant of the stories and the law of Liriethem, who tried to spend the night there to take refuge from a storm, or, in some cases, to see if they would find any valuable object to take away. The surprise was always the same: there was nothing in Liamsa, just rocks and death.

The funeral procession continued its march at a slow pace. Oril III's body was slowly approaching its final abode. The woman and the old priest continued with the duet, singing softly at times, stronger other times, but uninterruptedly as they left behind the world of the living to enter the land of the lifeless.

Finally, they got to where the famous "ten statues of Liriethem" were located, famous not so much for the sculptures themselves, but for the kings they represented. Some were true works of art, with a surprising level of detail, even though their raw material was only stone.⁶ The ten monuments marked the main entrance of the building where Oril III would be buried.

Inside, in the centre of a great hall, there was only a stone coffin with

⁶ Only the most important kings had such a sculpture. These ten monarchs had lives full of important events for the kingdom. All contributed during their lives to the glory of Liriethem. Among them were King Liriethem, also known as Liriethem I, creator of his lineage, who founded the city of Liriethem, the current capital of the kingdom, and his grandson, King Liriethem II (Liriethem II's father never became king, because he died before his time), who would bring the kingdom to its first glory. The statues of both were sculpted after their deaths, which is why many people say they have no resemblance to the original people.

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illustrations and inscriptions on its sides in the Liriethem style, with many details on people's faces, rough bodies, and using many bright colours. These normally told the story of the life of the person who would be inside the sarcophagus, with images about birth or marriage, or birth of a child and, being this the resting place of a monarch, the coronation, among other important events. The lid of the coffin was on the side, on the ground, waiting to be deposited in its place.

When the religious entourage entered the room, the songs ceased, and the silence was absolute. The young priests undid the package in which the body of the former ruler was being transported and placed it with extreme care in his grave. The older priest began with the corresponding Tilianist prayers: He had a strong and clear voice, although a little high pitched (that he spoke too quickly didn't help much either). His voice was the only thing heard in the whole enclosure.

- Tiliais, we deliver Oril III to you, Who was born from you, lived his life to the fullest, And now comes back to your side.

To which all together responded:

- And from you he will return stronger.

The priest continued:

- Two are born from one, and from two the infinite is born, May death do not discourage us, because we are all born from Tiliais...

Once again, the rest replied:

- And from her we will return stronger.

After finishing the prayers, they all remained silent for a few seconds and placed the lid on the grave. It was the last time Oril III's body would see any daylight. It was the culminating moment of the ceremony.

Once their task was finished, the entourage of priests slowly left the premises until only one person was left. Wrapped in darkness, the shadow was absolutely silent and stood there without moving a muscle for a long time. Anybody who would have seen the scene, would have thought that it was one of the ten statues of the great kings of yesteryear. With the exception that statues do not cry.

Large tears ran down that face hidden by the darkness, letting go of all the

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accumulated pain inside. When the sadness consumed all its strength, the shadow fell to the ground. Then, removed the silk veils from its head and dropped its long dark hair. “- Why did you have to die, father?” Said in a whisper full of pain, the voice of a young woman. It was Liriam Liriethem, eldest daughter of Oril III, princess of the kingdom and heiress to the throne.

None of the priests had stopped to wait for her and they could no longer be heard in the surroundings. But the princess had no interest in coming back with them. The idea had arisen spontaneously when she was leaving the city of Liriethem with the funeral cortege: this would also be her grave. She didn't care about her responsibilities as heiress to the throne of Liriethem⁷, since, with the death of her father, all that ceased to make sense to her. The kingdom had her mother, Queen Irialis, and her younger sister, Larem Liriethem, to deal with governance.

A long time passed and, if outside the grave the sun shone or the night reigned, the princess did not notice since, having no windows, everything was always dark. In the enclosure and throughout the city of Liamsa, the silence was absolute. Liriam only moved a little when her muscles cramped, almost always remaining in the foetal position next to the grave. All she cared about was staying by her father's side until it was time for her to accompany him on his last trip.

Many images passed through her mind during those moments: scenes from her childhood, moments in which she learned life lessons of great importance. Without being able to avoid it, memories in which Oril III exercised his position of ruler were also drawn into her thoughts. That was her father, that was the king: two people in one. The princess could not believe yet that she would never see him again.

Lost in those thoughts and memories, the princess fell asleep, with tears in her eyes.

⁷ In Liriethem, men and women had the same right of inheritance, even in royalty, which prevented the tireless search for the male successor, as it did in other cultures. According to the law, sons or daughters conceived within the royal union blessed by Tiliais could have royal aspirations.

The labyrinth city of Liamsa

The day followed the night, the sun rose and disappeared once again, but Liriam barely noticed the passage of time or changed position. Only from time to time she would sob silently, attacked by some memory of her father.

One night, however, something unexpected happened: human voices were heard and were slowly approaching the place where Liriam was. There seemed to be three or four men out there, but it was difficult to know for sure because of the echoes that were created in the vaulted halls of that part of the city. The princess tried to get up to hide, but her legs were very weak. As soon as she tried to stand up, she fell hard against the ground, hurting her hands and knees. The voices were almost in the room, so, without any other alternative, she crawled like a caterpillar behind the grave, hoping that the strangers would not want to take her away from her father.

- It's here! - shouted one, without any respect for the city or for the mortal remains that rested there.

- So, here is the bastard... the most rotten of all the rulers of Liriethem - said one and then spat on the ground, filling the princess with terror.

Who could not love her father? "He has been the best of all kings!", she almost cried out, when another person spoke.

- So it seems, Otis. Oril III... - and spat on the ground as well.

- You have no idea of what this bastard did to me... - started a third.

- Yes, we know, Tim - Otis interrupted - you don't have to tell us the same story twenty times.

- We all know that this bastard assaulted your sister - completed another

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voice.

- ... raped my sister... - continued Tim unperturbed, looking at the grave without hearing the comments of the other men - and now, I will have the last word... I will be the one who destroys the corpse of this dead fool.

- You going to do what? - The first man began to complain, along with the others - If you're going to do that with the old man's body, I hope at least you give me time to leave this room... I don't want to have pieces of this corpse on me and smell like a carcass for a whole week!

- I thought that our mission was only to take the old man's body so that the brotherhood⁸ could finish the ritual and we would only destroy this place. Nothing else.

- We all have our stories, Tim - Mirt said - we will do what we came to do and then we'll get out of this place. It gives me goose bumps.

One of the men was carrying some bags on his back. He threw them to the ground and began to distribute the spikes, shovels and hammers that were inside. Liriam watched everything from her hiding place. The words of the man named Tim reverberated still in her head. "Did my father rape his sister? It cannot be true! These have to be lies of enemies of the realm. Yes, they must be lies. My father was the most beloved man in Liriethem... which brotherhood were they talking about? Nothing these men say makes any sense to me."

When everyone was armed with their tools, they began hitting Oril III's sarcophagus. Unable to endure the devastation that these strange men were causing to the remains and memory of her father, the princess stood up, gathering strength from the depths of her heart.

- STOP! - she shouted with all her strength, getting everyone to stop doing what they were doing to look at her, frozen in the middle of the act, perhaps more surprised by the sudden appearance in a crypt, than frightened by the princess and her screams themselves - This is my father's grave! This is King Oril III! This is your king! And I am your princess, Liriam Liriethem!

⁸ The brotherhood was a small group of unimportant renegades, of ideas contrary to those of the Liriethem government. In this story there is no further mention of the ritual to which the men refer.

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The silence that followed frightened the princess beyond any other possible reaction from the group of men. The eyes of these strangers observed her for what seemed like an eternity, and after exchanging gestures between them, one of them stepped forward. Speaking, Liriam realized that it was the voice of the man they called Mirt.

- Your majesty, what are you doing in this place... alone? – He was looking everywhere, as if waiting to see the royal guard coming out from behind a column.

- I came to say goodbye to my father... and yes, I came alone so that nobody could bother me, neither with their prayers, nor with their unwanted presences - the princess's courage was extinguished like a candle in the middle of a storm, but she didn't want show fear in front of the profaners.

- What a pleasant coincidence... - Mirt answered - because we also wanted to say goodbye to our "beloved" king. Isn't that right, men?

- Yes... - said another man whose voice Liriam could not recognize - we simply wanted to... thank him. Yes, that's the word: thank him for everything he did for us.

Liriam knew that something was not right. It took an instant, what it takes to breathe air through the nose; an invisible spark caused all events to happen at the same time: the men all threw themselves on top of Liriam, still armed with the hammers they were going to use to destroy the grave. The princess jumped back, barely avoiding them, and started running.

She left the building where her father's grave was located and escaped without knowing too well where she was going, panicking. She was tired after spending several days without eating and her body did not respond as she wanted it to. Her tired legs complained at every step she took, and her side ached from the lack of energy, but her fear of being taken allowed her to keep on moving.

The city of Liamsa was a maze of tombs where doors, corridors and halls followed one another. Besides, Liriam was alone... completely alone. "Unless the dead can come to my aid, no one is going to defend me against those men... I have to escape!" Liriam thought. Her feet led her to a large hall, narrow and very long. Seeing a door on the left side of the enclosure, she ran

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in that direction. The footsteps of the profaners were heard nearby, so she entered it without thinking for a second. As soon as she passed the threshold, Liriam realized that she was going to get personally acquainted with Liamsa's labyrinth, as described in all the children's stories. First, there were two paths, then three, then four, then two again... until one completely lost track of where one was. "In this way, I will surely lose them... but I will never be able to leave this place either!"

The princess ran until her legs, her lungs and her heart wouldn't allow it anymore. When Liriam was completely out of breath, she decided to stop to rest. Nothing was heard and Liamsa became once again the city of the dead, "maybe I lost them."

She went into a room that had three dust-covered graves inside, there were spider webs everywhere. "Forgotten Kings... who may they be... or, rather, who were they? What kind of rulers were they? These remains used to be living, breathing people...rulers", Liriam meditated.

Lirithem had thousands of years of history and all their former regents were buried in Liamsa⁹. Despite the desperate situation she was in, the princess felt a great sadness thinking of those kings full of dirt and forgotten by their people. "Will it be the same for my father? Will history forget him too? And me? Will they even remember me before they can forget me?"

Liriam sat on the floor next to one of the graves and slowly caught her breath. Because of the darkness she couldn't see much, but her eyes were getting accustomed quickly. In the distance, voices were heard and that reassured her. "I will simply wait for them to leave... although, what for? Most likely they will return to my father's grave and finish destroying his remains. But, if they find me, it will be MY remains that they will destroy... what other option do I have but to stay where I am? When they leave Liamsa I will go back to my father... or whatever is left of him... and I will accompany him once again."

Darkness and silence were the only company of Liriam during those mo-

⁹ This story is based on the infantile belief of the citizens of Lirithem and their delusions of greatness, who believe that all their rulers rest in Liamsa - of course they aren't! In addition, Lirithem had existed for hundreds of years when the city of Liamsa became a royal tomb. Very few people in Lirithem have clear notions of their own history.

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ments, while her heart was getting back to beating normally again and her breathing resumed in a more regular rhythm. Lost in her thoughts, she didn't notice a soft rustle, a light sound, as weak as a breeze. Between dreams about her father and her life in the capital of the kingdom, the sound approached her without the princess being aware of any presence, until it reached the door of the room. The shadow stood still in the doorway, watching. Liriam was with one foot in the world of dreams when the shadow suddenly spoke. Liriam woke up with a start: the voice she heard made her panic.

- Get out of there, little princess... - it was Tim's voice, but he didn't speak as before: he had a sharper tone and spoke very slowly. - The others are not going to bother us anymore.

Liriam stood up as quickly as she could, regaining consciousness almost immediately and ran towards the door. The surprise and Liriam's speed took Tim off guard, and could not get his hands on her. While running, Liriam heard Tim running after her, laughing out loud and speaking at the same time, cursing her, her father, Liamsa and the Liriethem kingdom alike. When he was running almost side by side with Liriam, he began to hit her legs, but failed to make her fall.

Fear made Liriam run faster and faster. She knew that if she fell, it would be the end of her. At the same time, the darkness made it difficult to choose a direction to escape. For a second, Liriam could see a glow in the darkness behind her, the glare of Tim's eyes, completely open and not blinking, as he threw himself with the full weight of his body, causing Liriam to stumble and jump into the air. Liriam waited for the fall, the hard blow against the stone floor, the pain... and what would come next, when she could no longer escape. But that moment did not come...

An unexpected reunion

Gravity seemed to take its time and Liriam continued to fall without encountering any resistance. When her body finally found the ground, the pain she felt was the greatest she had ever experienced in her life. A freezing wave rose through her body and was blinded by the pain, only seeing a kind of a white fog for a few seconds. She started screaming inconsolably: her leg was broken; she knew it to be so.

In the distance she heard someone screaming. "Where are you? WHERE ARE YOU?" There was no doubt, it was Tim. But the princess couldn't understand how Tim could be so far away, when only a few seconds ago he had knocked her down. She decided to endure the pain and try not to scream anymore, because she did not want to betray her location to her foe. She didn't know where she was, but anywhere was better than where she was before she fell. As Tim's cries faded away, Liriam calmed down a bit.

She realized then, with her eyes full of tears, that her leg was intact, but that her foot had begun to swell. It was a price she was willing to pay to get away from the danger she had been exposed to – the pain was great, but she still could move. She looked about the area where she had fallen and saw something that seemed to be a pile of old clothes: someone's body, long dead. It was the clothes of the corpse, and its remains, that had cushioned her fall. Liriam silently thanked the person that, with its death, saved her life.

She found a wooden rod thrown to the side, probably remains of an ancient coffin, and, helping herself with it, set out to investigate a little. Wherever she looked, Liriam only saw graves. "I must be in some lost area of Liamsa. If it wasn't that I almost died so many times in the last minutes, I would even say

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that this is interesting.”

Without realizing it, Liriam’s attitude had changed: until recently, she had wanted to die with her father, leaving everything aside. Now, having listened to those men, not only did she desire to live, a feeling new in her life, but above anything else, she wanted to know the truth.

“The truth is only one!“, she told herself. She had a clear objective. “I have to get out of here and go back to Liriethem. I have to know if what those men were saying about my father is true.” And a deeper voice in her being said, fiercely: “And get Tim arrested, let the royal guard cut off his head... and why not? Find maybe a couple of soldiers that... ehem, “play” with him.” That such a thought arose from herself took her aback for a moment, but then she smiled and kept moving forward.

The place had countless ancient tombs, silent witnesses of the passage of time, never bothered until the visit of Liriam. Looking quickly over the tombstones, the princess only saw names of kings she did not know. None of that was different from the rest of Liamsa, so the princess did not pay much attention to the graves of those great kings of yesteryear. “I wonder what stories these ancient kings could tell me. Maybe they would tell me about a completely different Liriethem from the one I know. Once I get out of here, I must pay a short visit to the historians of the kingdom and discover its secrets. But now I must get out of here, and for that I have to stay alive!”

The princess continued her way, slowly and with difficulty, holding back tears because of the pain in her foot, fearing what she would find in every corner. An inner voice gave her courage: she had lived her life more intensely in these last days than in all her twenty years of age. She had just survived unharmed (“or almost,” she thought) the attack of a man who had lost his mind completely, and she had managed to recover from her depression caused by the death of her father.

Walking a few more minutes, she found a door with some strange inscriptions. It had many drawings in the same style as those in her father’s grave, Liriethem’s style. In the dark, Liriam did not stop to appreciate those details

AN UNEXPECTED REUNION

and see what stories they told. Maybe if she had read the warnings,¹⁰ since that was what they were, maybe she would have chosen to take a different path¹¹. Liriam went through the door and found herself in a huge, high room with large columns. Everything was dirty and dusty, and the air felt heavy. There were old illustrations on the walls, painted directly on the stones, faded by time. There were some stone statues, also in a dilapidated state that had a simpler and rougher style, much unlike the beauty and level of detail of the statues that Liriam had seen before, at the entrance of Liamsa.

- I want to get out of here, but I don't have any reference as to where I am... this only makes things more difficult. Where can a room as big as this one be hidden in Liamsa?

Something stood out in the middle of the room that caught the attention of the princess: the statue of a king¹².

- It can't be; there are only ten statues of the great kings of yesteryear. Who does this statue represent? Why is it in this lost room instead of being with the others? What king does not have his place among the ten great kings of Liriethem but still is important enough to have a statue?

Curious, she approached the statue taking small leaps towards it while leaving her swollen foot hanging. At the base of the statue some marks could be seen, an inscription barely legible.

¹⁰ "This is the final abode of the souls of Liriethem. If you are not Liriethem, do not enter; if you do not have royal blood, do not enter; if you want to continue living... do not enter", written in the old language of Liriethem.

¹¹ Or maybe she would have entered it anyway, since it was no longer Liriam who was making decisions, but her blood that guided her, being called by her ancestors.

¹² No one knows the true origin of this text, but it was widely known in the kingdom of Liriethem. Many people tried to find the same room where Liriam found the statue, which was renamed "the lone king's chamber." No one ever found it, of course, giving rise to hundreds of legends and stories about its origin and many more doubts about its existence. Many think that only the heirs of the Liriethem kings can access this site, based on the warnings Liriam found at the entrance. One of the most elaborate theories, but not less interesting, is that Liriam's story was invented by a group of fans of the Liriethem monarchy, to create an aura of supernatural mystery around a declining government model, and extend it for many more years. "Our rulers are not ordinary people, they are special beings, they are gods, with supernatural powers."

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- The text is too worn out, I can't read what it says - said the princess, beginning to clean up the dust and dirt accumulated over time.

Being engaged in this task, a wind suddenly began to blow, so strong and so cold, that Liriam had to cover her face. The gale seemed to come from all directions at the same time and the temperature dropped to the point of covering the surface of the statue with a thin layer of frost. Liriam fell to the ground, pushed by the force of the wind, and from there she felt movement everywhere in the great hall. She clung to the statue and, unexpectedly and as suddenly as it had begun, the wind stopped completely.

Opening her eyes slowly, Liriam met a crowd that filled the great hall. She did not know how such a group of people had been able to appear so quickly on the premises, nor had she heard anyone behind her on her way to that place.

- Who are all of you? What do you want from me? - shouted the princess, completely terrified and shivering with cold.

"Are they Tim's reinforcements to attack me? Do all these people hate my father too?", she thought to herself. Without any other alternative, the princess stood up and then tried to scare the shadows with her title.

- Let me go!... Don't you know who you have in front of you? I'm Princess Liri...

- We know well who you are... - a voice spoke from behind her - and you don't have to be afraid of us... Liriam II of Liriethem¹³ - finished saying the statue, without moving his lips.

Liriam looked at the face of the talking monument, which was addressing her, jumped back, falling to the ground, and shouted both in fear for what she

¹³ Liriam had received her name in honor of Queen Liriam I of Liriethem, also called "the fertile one" or "the mother of Liriethem". She remains a part of the kingdom's history because she had 157 children. Legend has it that Liriam I died at the age of 54, which would mean that "the fertile one" would have been born pregnant and would have been pregnant even after death. Many claimed that the majority of Liriam I's children were bastards, generating innumerable conflicts in the line of succession in the following 200 years of history in Liriethem, since the intrigues generated between legitimate children and bastards resulted in countless death attacks on the monarchs. The story of "the fertile one" is a very famous legend in the kingdom and she is invoked to help women who have difficulties in getting pregnant. "May Liriam I help you have offspring," say the elderly Liriethems women.

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saw and because of the pain in her foot.

Liriam knew she hadn't gone crazy. The statue was made of rock, "... and rocks don't speak." But, without mistake, the voice came from the man made of stone before her, the great forgotten king, for she had heard it herself.

The movement around the enclosure had stopped. The princess noticed that all these people were watching her expectantly.

- Who are you? Why shouldn't I be afraid of you? My soldiers are waiting outside the city to protect me... - Liriam tried to sound harsh, but her voice was shaking and couldn't help showing the fear she felt - and how knowing who I am do you get in my way? - "Although you don't know me at all, because I'm not Liriam II... I didn't have time to assume my father's throne, I'm still just Liriam Liriethem", she thought without saying a word.

- You could never lie very well, there's nobody out there waiting for you. The soldiers who came days ago are all back in Liriethem by now. And no, you should not be afraid. We know who you are... Liriam II... - replied the statue emphasizing her name. This time Liriam looked directly into the stone eyes, as he spoke - daughter of the late Oril III of Liriethem.

- But... Who are you? How can you know all this? How do you know about my father? - said the princess, increasingly scared.

- Because it was him who told us - calmly answered the statue.

When saying these last words, the statue began to radiate a strong light and Liriam could not continue looking directly at the eyes of rock. The whole enclosure burst into light and all the forms that until a few seconds ago looked like shadows were transformed into luminous beings.

As her eyes became accustomed to the new lighting of the room, Liriam could slowly recognize that these luminous beings were indeed people. "What kind of sorcery is this?", she asked in terror.

A luminous being in the shape of a tall man who looked a lot like the statue was in front of her.

- Here, in front of you, are the souls of the royalty of Liriethem... You must not be afraid, because you are among your kin.

- The souls? - The princess began to feel all the hairs on her body bristle, - do you mean that you are the souls of all the dead kings and queens of Liriethem?

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How can it be?

- Is it really that surprising, Liriam II? "How can it be?" is a question we never ask ourselves, since it is simply so. We are here, and nothing more. For the whole eternity? It may be, maybe not... but what does it matter? We are in this room that we call "the tomb of the eternal kings"¹⁴ and we continue our existence in the sacred city of Liamsa until the time comes for us to abandon it. When will that time come? We don't know, maybe it never will. What kind of existence do we have here? I could not say... we are not alive; we have no heart in our bones, or bones at all... but our consciences endure. The first settlers of these lands, the founders of the city may have something to do with our permanence in the realm of the living, but we do not know for sure. The truth is that we do not wonder or worry about it. As I said, we are here and nothing more.

- Yes, so it seems...- replied the princess regaining a little calm - I have so many questions! Are each of you really part of my family? Are the big ten of Liriethem here too? And the King Orelei II, the desired? What happened when he went to war? And why did he never come back to Liriethem¹⁵? Although perhaps the most important question I have is one I would like to address to you, your majesty... who are you? You have a statue! You must have been a great king! But... this statue is hidden in this underground room... Why?

- I knew you were going to ask me that... I want to tell you everything, Liriam II, but there are more important things to discuss at the moment. Don't worry, we'll have enough time to chat, you and I, daughter of Oril III.

When the spirit of the statue mentioned her father's name again, the

¹⁴ The historians mentioned before decided to change the name of the room, as already explained. Many men think that by changing the name of things, they can give it another meaning. It is this type of person who thinks that, by modifying some facts, the course of history can be controlled. Who controls the past, controls the present, they think.

¹⁵ King Orelei II, being a young monarch newly ascended to the throne, set off to distant lands, west of Liriethem, to defend the kingdom from a threat he considered imminent, a war with the followers of the Baharism, that is, the Dragon in the story of the Hydra and the Dragon. He never returned to Liriethem, disappearing forever. There are people who still await the return of King Orelei II, "the lost one" or "the desired".

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princess forgot everything else she had in her mind. Her curiosity and her hundreds of questions were suddenly forgotten.

- So, it was my father, Oril III, who told them about my identity, right? - Liriam said loudly, so that everyone could listen to her - Where is he now? I need to talk to him!

The spirits were real, Liriam had no doubt about it, but, although she wanted to believe it with all her might, she could not believe that there was a possibility that her father was also a spectrum of Liamsa and that she would ever see him again.

Oril III was dead, she had seen him on the ground, lifeless, in the Heart of the Hydra¹⁶. She would never forget that day: she had been urgently called to the palace, ran to her father's room only to find dozens of silent servants standing around. Making her way among the people there, she was able to reach the bed and it was there that she saw him, lying down, as if he were sleeping. But his face was calmer than usual... paler.

Then everything happened too quickly, as if she had been hypnotized: she had accompanied the procession of Tilianist monks to the sepulchre... and they had left the body in its final abode. And now... she had never fully believed the religious hoaxes that proclaimed that death would "make us stronger." However, here were the souls. Was this what the Tilianist monks were referring to? But how could this mean "stronger"? Would we all return to the world of the living in the form of luminous beings? Does Tiliais really exist?

The princess was deeply concentrated in these thoughts when, suddenly, all her ideas and questions in her head disappeared. A luminous form approached her.

- FATHER! I cannot believe it! Is it really you? - shouted the princess, forgetting all those around her and all the suffering of these last days. Despite the pain she felt in her ankle, Liriam ran to meet him with tears in her eyes.

- No, my daughter, stay away. - Oril III said, almost in a whisper, raising a hand to stop her.

¹⁶ The Heart of the Hydra is the name that receives the abode of the king in the city of Liriethem.

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- But, father...

- Yes, I am Oril III... or, rather, what is left of him on this earth. Memories and experiences. A simple reflection of what I used to be.

- It makes me very happy, father... - Liriam said crying – to be able to see the reflection of your being... to see you once more. I thought I would never see you again and I couldn't say goodbye to you...

- Here I am, my daughter. But you must recover from the shock. Sorry to be a little rough in this reunion, but you said that you are happy to see me again and to talk to me once more. That is exactly what I want, Liriam, since perhaps that is the only thing I can do: talk to you. I fear that what I have to tell you are bad news and that the information will put you in danger. - Oril III explained in the same whispered voice in which he had spoken before.

- What is it, father? What danger are you talking about?

- It happens, dear daughter, that the being that you see here descended into this hidden cave of Liamsa against his will and ahead of his time. That someone in the world of the living got in the way of my life's destiny...

- What do you mean by all this, father? Is that perhaps you...?

- Yes. I, Oril III of Liriethem, was murdered.

The joy that Liriam had felt when she saw her father became a cold sweat all over her body. She felt her legs weaken, as if she was falling off a cliff. Since she met those mysterious brotherhood men and heard what they had said, the princess did not have a very good feeling about her father and his death. But when she heard, from her own father's mouth, incredibly, that he had been killed, it filled her with doubts and an alien feeling for a princess: helplessness. It was as if her fate escaped her hands. She knew that the time would come to discuss all these issues with her father in detail, but now the pain of losing him at the hands of a murderer made her tremble with hatred and frustration. Not only had she suffered, but her mother, her sister and all the citizens of Liriethem. She had to do something, she had to get justice.

- Tell me who it was, and I will avenge you, father. I don't care who it was or what justifications were given for this: it is unforgivable, and I will return to this cave with the head of the murderer.

- That was what we expected to hear from you, Liriam II - said the brilliant

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shape of the king who had left the statue, approving of Liriam's energy.

- SOULS OF LIRIETHEM! - The princess called, without listening to what the old king had said - LISTEN TO MY COMMAND, PLEASE! I NEED YOUR HELP!

- Speak... - the spirits answered in unison.

- I WANT THE COURAGE TO FIGHT AGAINST THIS INJUSTICE! BUT I NEED POWER TO DEFEAT MY ENEMIES!

- Who are your enemies? - the souls asked calmly.

Oril III watched in silence as the dialogue developed. The king statue just smiled.

- THE MURDERERS OF MY FATHER! - Liriam shouted, full of pain.

- What do you offer in return?

- What? What do I offer...?

- The souls of Liriethem are willing to offer you everything you request... but we ask you: what do you offer in return?

It was a question that Liriam was not expecting. She didn't think she should give them anything in return, since they were, after all, her relatives. "I am alive, and they are not..." , she thought to herself, as if it were the most obvious reason in the world. "I am the only one who can do something."

- Souls of Liamsa, great kings of yesteryear, former rulers of the great nation of Liriethem, this is what I offer you in return: I promise you to be the tool of your designs, the hammer that forges a new destiny for Liriethem, the executioner of our enemies and the judge of truth... - and more in a whisper - I offer my life to the glory of Liriethem.

- Louder...

- Eh? What? - Liriam looked surprised.

- Repeat your words... louder.

- I offer you my life for the glory of...

- Louder!

- I offer you my life for the glory...

- LOUDER!

- I OFFER YOU MY LIFE!

The echo of her voice reverberated a few seconds in the hall lit only by the light emitted by Liriethem's royalty. When the echo died in the distance in the

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depths of Liamsa's labyrinth and there was silence again, the soft whisper of the king statue's voice was heard.

- We accept it...

The awakening of the warrior

Liriam was not sure she had heard correctly... what was the answer to her offer? But the confusion lasted only a few seconds. Suddenly she felt an odd warmth sweep through her body; she felt suffocating, she felt her body burn in flames!

Liriam fell to the ground, trying to tear off her skin: it burned as if she had hundreds of embers on her. Her cries of pain echoed on the same walls where, only a few seconds ago, her promise to the spirits had reverberated. Nobody else could hear her¹⁷: only the souls, who watched her in silence and did nothing.

The princess twisted and rolled on the floor, crawled, but the pain did not subside. She was breathing with difficulty, making horrible noises, suffocating from the heat she felt. Her whole life flashed before her eyes: every event, every decision... every moment that had led her to this place and this instant. The pain continued to increase until Liriam went blind... her screams continued, but the princess heard them farther and farther away, until her body could no longer hold, and fainted, falling to the ground out cold.

¹⁷ The original text excludes Tim and the looters of the tomb of Oril III, either because time passed and they withdrew from Liamsa, or because, lost in the labyrinth of the city, they perished in their inextricable halls (of hunger or, killed at the hands of each other), or because the souls themselves killed every living being in the city by showing themselves to Liriam. The story does not delve into details about what happened to them. However, the most likely possibility is that Tim, in the state of sudden insanity he was in, killed everyone. This theme, that is, sudden madness, is repeated in many accounts of Liamsa. And again it is related to "the curse of Liamsa", although there is no evidence to confirm such a thing.

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Liriam swam in her unconscious, floating over the kingdom of Liriethem, walking through the people she loved, talking to people she didn't know. Time seemed to extend infinitely, until she began to fall... a strong nausea made her lose all sense of orientation, and her insides only wanted to leave her body... the final blow was approaching, but a few seconds before the end... she opened her eyes: she had returned to herself. Her body was beating... everything seemed different... she felt full of energy, radiant. The sensation was strange, because the pain had not disappeared, but she no longer experienced it in the same way: It felt almost pleasant, like a new awakening, a rebirth.

- THIS IS THE BEST I EVER FELT IN MY LIFE! - she shouted from the ground, where she was still laying. Then, she stood up and had a long, loud laugh. Her foot had also healed. "It's a miracle," she thought, "but I guess it couldn't be otherwise now that I was just reborn?"

The spectres kept silent, watchful. The princess seemed to be out of her mind and looked at her hands, arms and legs as if it were the first time she saw them. A gentle breeze swirled around her body, moving her hair continuously - she was surprised to realize that it was her body that raised that wind, although she did not know what it meant. This self-contemplation lasted a long time, until it was interrupted by the statue king.

- Liriam II...

- Eh? Ah, yes... what do you want? - Liriam replied sharply, sounding annoyed.

- I thought you were interested in knowing who your father's murderer was, but maybe I was wrong...

- Yes! Tell me right now! And I will bring you his head to this enclosure, to accompany the magnificent kings of Liriethem for all eternity and contemplate the greatness of...

- Shut up and listen! - interrupted angrily the statue king - You have received the blessing of the souls of Liriethem. And because of it you will experience many changes: wherever you go, you will always take us with you. The power you have received will bring death and pain... but it will help you fight your enemies. However, let me warn you: be careful; don't let these new sensations make you arrogant and careless... You must go to Liriethem and

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return to the Heart of the Hydra. See with your new eyes and feel the world as we do. You can see directly into other people's souls just by looking into their eyes. You will know then whose heart is dark and quickly find the murderer. We cannot interfere... directly... in the lives of men, so the responsibility is entirely yours. – The statue king sounded awkward for a moment, but that feeling disappeared as quickly as it had come. – Consider this as a test: prove yourself to the spirits and prove that we have chosen well.

– Excellent! I will find this dark heart. – Liriam replied without feeling appalled by anything the statue king had said. It seemed to her that much of what he had said made no sense, but she didn't really care. Her body was full of energy and she wanted to leave Liamsa as quickly as possible to test these powers that “will bring death and pain.” She turned ready to leave, decided not to waste a second.

– Wait! – said the statue king – Before you go, you must put out the fire burning in your being. Continue your way down that hallway you see at the end of the room. Once there, you will find many empty rooms without any value to you, one after the other: do not stop and keep walking until you eventually find a cave. This road will allow you to leave Liath, the mountain where Liamsa ends. A few yards more and you will find a lake: Once there, drink some of the water. It is very important that you do this. And, above all, follow your instincts.

– What? “Follow my instincts”; what do you mean by that? Why must everything be so cryptic and mysterious, is there nothing you can tell me directly? – Liriam said, a little annoyed.

– You're another person now, Liriam II... you just haven't noticed it yet. – Liriam and the statue king looked at each other intensely for a few seconds. When Liriam was ready to leave, the statue king told her again, almost on purpose to annoy her: “Don't forget, follow your instincts.”

– Who are you, after all?! – Liriam barely finished her question; the statue king had disappeared.

– Father, I promise you that I will avenge your death! – said Liriam.

Only Oril III remained in the enclosure as the ancient kings of Liriethem slowly faded one by one, just as the statue king had done. Oril III looked at

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her sadly for a few seconds and nodded, then disappeared like the rest of the souls. The enclosure was just as Liriam had found it when she arrived – an empty place, the same ruins and a statue of a forgotten king in the middle – and, wondering if she had dreamed everything, she shouted:

- I will return! – and, to herself, she thought “... and I will squeeze the whole truth out of the statue king... wait and you will see”.

Only the echo of her voice was the answer. She turned and left the hall, ready to find that lake.

Liriam walked almost an hour through countless funeral halls, all in the same deplorable state as “the tomb of the eternal kings.” The limit of Liamsa and the beginning of the mountain Liath was abrupt, a room that faced a cave, as if someone had stopped building halfway; Liriam took the first step in Liath’s stone floor and left the mausoleum of the kings to follow her destiny.

With each step, the air in the cave became more humid and fresher. She did not have to walk too far to find the place indicated by the statue king: a lake, illuminated only by a small beam of light that came from among some rocks at the top of the cave, with calm and very dark waters. As much as she tried, it was impossible for Liriam to see the bottom. In the middle of the lake there was a small island, just a pile of dirt or accumulated sand that stood out from the water. But there was something there, shining brightly. Once again driven by her curiosity, and still excited by the previous events, Liriam decided to go to the island to see what it was. Her curiosity for strange things had taken her to the statue king... and he had told her to follow her instincts, so there wasn’t anything else to discuss.

As she stepped into the water, coldness swept through her whole being. The water was freezing, the burning sensation in her body began to fade. She knew what she had to do, and, without hesitation, she threw herself into the lake. The shock lasted only a couple seconds. After spending a few moments in the water, Liriam felt relief, as if applying ice to a burn. She swam across the lake, smiling and almost having fun, until she remembered what she was doing in that place. She swam in the direction of the island to see what that shining object was.

She came out of the water and drained her clothes which, by then, were in

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rags and quite dirty: Tim's persecution through Liamsa's labyrinth and her "rebirth" earlier had left their mark on her clothes as well.

At that moment she remembered the words of the statue king "before you go ... drink some water..." Liriam thought that, after having plunged into the lake, the fire would be as good as extinguished but, wanting to follow the instructions of her ancestors as best as possible, she decided to do that too. She crouched in front of the water and, with her hands, she gathered a little of the liquid and drank. The sensation was even more refreshing than what she had felt when entering the lake. She felt the fire that consumed her being extinguished with every sip... until finally it was completely gone. It was the coolest water she had ever drunk. When she finished drinking, she realized that the air her body was generating since her transformation had also disappeared. "It is for the best... I would look a little weird, entering the Heart of the Hydra doing that", Liriam thought.

She then approached the centre of the small island, to check what that bright object was: a bow.

- But no arrows... humm, I wonder."

She examined it carefully, admiring the carved details on the wood: a dozens of hydras were interlaced, coming out of one another's mouth, shaping the weapon. It was hard to say if the hydras were born from one from the other, or if they were eating each other - Liriam preferred not to think about that.

Almost by reflex, Liriam took the bow, tensed the string with full force and released it. Her jaw dropped in surprise when she saw a bright arrow coming out of the bow, flying with incredible speed against a rock near the water, blowing it up into a thousand pieces, and generating a small rain of rocks and water. Liriam smiled and thanked the ancient kings of Liriethem silently, for she knew it was a last gift from them. She tied the bow on her back and ran away, at full speed, from the cave.

She felt a breeze that indicated the exit and the light grew stronger as she moved in that direction. At the end of the path, and when she was outside again, Liriam realized where she was: a side entrance of Liamsa, long forgotten by the courtships of Tilianist priests. The stale air of the giant mausoleum was left behind and Liriam felt the freshness of the clean air play with her hair.

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She didn't know how long it had been since she had arrived in Liamsa with her father's body and the Tilianist priests, but everything had changed since that moment – she couldn't know what lay ahead of her, but certainly nothing would be the same as before. She knew she had become someone different.

As she felt the sunlight on her face, she experienced entirely new sensations: she felt as if her body had been cured of a long illness. It was lighter, stronger, tougher. She was also surer of herself and anxious for the challenges that awaited her. Now, no one would choose for her, she was taking the reins of her destiny.

Since she had no other way to get to Liriethem, she began to walk. She had come with the royal entourage to the edge of the city and then disguised herself to hide among the monks in order to accompany her father.

- Nobody noticed my absence, and nobody stayed behind to wait for me. It doesn't really matter; I'll find some way to move faster eventually. For the moment, my feet will set the pace and the sun, and the stars will guide me.

The princess was happy to have a second chance in her life and, knowing that she had the spirits of her ancestors at her side, she didn't feel alone anymore. Besides, she was happy to have seen her father once more and the idea of seeing him again gave her hope.

The road to Liriethem was normally done in five or six days on horseback; walking would take at least two weeks.

- That is, as long as I don't get lost... I never had to walk anywhere beyond the walls of the palace, least of it alone. I guess I will have to make up for the lost time... a whole lifetime, to be exact...

The wasteland spreading all around Liamsa was called the "Liriethem Desert"¹⁸ and that was where she was heading. Liriam thought she remem-

¹⁸ The wasteland called "Liriethem Desert" originated in the reign of Doral IV, during the "Battle of the Beasts", eight generations after the great king Liriethem founded the kingdom. The "Battle of the Beasts", during the "Heroic War", was named like that because of the number of animals used during the attack. There was so much death and destruction during the conflict, that the area was transformed into the desolate area that it is today.

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bered that there was a small river ¹⁹ somewhere close by, with boats travelling constantly – they could take her to the city faster. But to get to the river she would still need to walk, there was no other option.

The princess walked for many hours but the horizon always seemed distant.

– Is it true what those looters said? I didn't have time to ask my father about that. Although, to be honest, I didn't have much time to talk to him about anything. He didn't look very happy either, the truth be told. I wonder how he got to that place. Why is he not with Tiliais but still imprisoned in this world? Could it be some kind of punishment, for something he did during his life? May it be that these men were speaking the truth? Although, that would also apply to all the other spirits I've seen in Liamsa. I can't believe that my father did something to deserve such punishment. And I can't stop wondering about Tiliais. Argh... I don't understand any of it! Now that I'm out of Liamsa, I can perhaps find out many things by myself. Are they wondering where I am, in the Heart of the Hydra? They may not have noticed my absence... My mother would be very worried about me if she knew half of the things that I have experienced in the capital of the dead. But I still haven't decided if I'll tell her, she probably wouldn't believe a word, anyway... On second thoughts, nobody would believe me. They would think I made everything up to get their attention... that used to be my life – She sighed deeply – ... but not anymore!

Liriam hurried over to find that river as soon as possible. Perhaps her mother would know more about her father's last days, things that only she could know, some clue to follow to find the murderer.

Only at that moment did Liriam realize the danger that the queen, her mother, and the other princess, her sister Larem, were in, being both in the Heart of the Hydra: Perhaps the murderer was not done with his work. If someone had been able to kill the king, they might also want to kill the queen

¹⁹ The Doral River gets its name from Doral V, son of Doral IV. Doral V was the one who ended the "Heroic War", bringing peace to Liriethem. The calm waters of the river perfectly represent the peace that came after the war. Liriam must not have paid too much attention to her history classes, or the fact that the Doral River reaches the gates of Liriethem. It may also be that the author of the text ignored these facts; his identity is unknown, but many Liriethem thinkers consider the author to be a foreigner because of this type of inconsistency.

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or someone else of the royal family... or anyone who got in their way. This thought troubled Liriam deeply, who became nervous and tense.

Despite walking fast, the road seemed endless and there were no signs of the river. Slowly, night fell and Liriam couldn't advance much further. Tiredness had finally reached her and she decided to sit against one of the few bushes standing in the Liriethem desert. It bothered her that her body was so weak and that she couldn't go as quickly as possible to help her relatives and subjects. The more she thought about it, the more and more frustrated she became.

- The regicide is still alive and free... and I am here, far away, alone in the middle of nowhere and tired! - she shouted angrily.

Liriam's anger rose quickly, as such thoughts spread through her mind - as hard as she tried, she couldn't put them aside. Her eyes moved from side to side at great speed, trying to reach her thoughts.

Her anger finally exploded in a burst of rage. Liriam shouted with all her might, closing her eyes and clenching her fists. The scream seemed to have no end in Liriam's head but letting out all her accumulated frustrations brought her much peace.

When she opened her eyes again, she was frightened with the sight in front of her eyes: all the small bushes around her were blackened, as if they had been burnt... and the little grass that had covered the floor around her disappeared completely. Her unleashed anger, even if it just lasted for a few seconds, had managed to annihilate all life around her.

The princess put her hands to her mouth. She was afraid because she knew that these were the powers that she had received from the Liriethem's spirits: the power of death.

- I must keep calm, that's all - she repeated to herself - all this happened because I got carried away by my feelings. If I calm down, nothing will happen. But... what if I don't keep calm when talking to someone... will I kill them too? What have I become? I need this power to defeat my enemies, but I can't let it control me. I have to master it... make use of it at my will.

Decided not to waste time, Liriam walked over to some plants, which her anger had not reached: a mere half a dozen bushes of different sizes. "Perfect for practice" - the princess stared at the plants with intensity for a few minutes,

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but, as time passed, nothing happened.

- I'm afraid of losing control now... I have to forget what happened a few seconds ago and try to concentrate...

A group of wolves had approached her in silence, without her noticing. When Liriam finally perceived a strange presence, it was too late: the animals threw themselves on her. Liriam repelled the attack, kicking them, and fencing them off from her, getting away with only a few bites. She stood up, and tried to escape the rest, but more wolves were waiting and blocked her way. In total, there were around twenty animals surrounding her. The beasts growled and drooled... their food was waiting for them. Liriam had no escape.

One of the wolves stepped forward... and screamed in pain, stepping back quickly. The animal stared at the ground and its paw alternately: You could see on the face of the animal that it did not understand what was happening. Its eyes met Liriam's, focused on its prey, and the wolf tried to approach Liriam once more... only to shout again and step back.

Liriam had a strange glow in her eyes; their normal blue had become almost white and only her black pupils seemed to float from side to side in the white of her eyes. The fear was completely gone. She was strangely calm, a controlled fury.

The other wolves tried to enter the invisible circle where the princess was but suffered the same fate as the first of the pack. Liriam, then, raised her arms and all the wolves began to float in the air, twisting in pain. The animals screamed and cried, but Liriam barely blinked. She didn't know what she was doing or what would result from that, she just knew it would work. She was simply... following her instincts.

The princess slowly approached one of the wolves and looked at it straight in the eye, almost as if she was challenging the animal. She made a rapid movement in the air with her right hand, as if she were moving away something she did not want to see, and the animal fell to the ground ceasing all movement. It was dead.

She walked slowly around all the wolves and the same thing happened again and again: a sudden movement in the air and there was a groan less heard in the night. She did the same with every single one of the animals until there was

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only one left. This one, however, Liriam left to suffer a while longer. Watching him, Liriam thought: "I will never be a prey again." She concentrated on the animal and the beast's spasms increased. The wolf bit itself, howled... but the princess did not blink. Finally, the last member of the pack gave his final sigh, its heart couldn't stand it anymore and it stood still. Liriam was breathing deeply, trying to assimilate what she had done. Her eyes slowly recovered their normal colour and she took a long breath.

- The best thing to do now would be to rest.

The next day, Liriam woke up at dawn. The night had passed calmly – she slept warmly among the skins of dead wolves, undeterred, as if it were the most normal thing in the world to wake up to such an apocalyptic scene.

Liriam felt hungry and was not shocked for a second when she looked at the lifeless wolves and felt appetite. Who once was a princess, in a castle full of servants and always eating the most exquisite dishes, approached one of the animals on the ground and effortlessly began to dismember it with her own hands. She quickly built a fire with some dry branches that she found nearby and cooked the meat until it was a bit burnt. Liriam was only satisfied when she had eaten two whole legs: The meat was chewy, but the feeling she had when she was finished was of pure pleasure.

After an abundant breakfast, and leaving the dismembered bodies of the wolves where they laid, Liriam resumed her search for the river. Little by little she was moving away from the wilderness of the Liriethem Desert, and more and more trees and plants started to appear in the landscape. This must be the right direction, she thought.

The souls' chosen – one was a strange image to observe, bathed in dried blood and dirty from the dust of Liamsa and the Desert. Luckily, and due to the road she took through thick forests, neither man nor beast crossed her path after the attack of the wolves. The day was clear and, with renewed energy, Liriam walked optimistically – every step she took she was closer to Liriethem. In the middle of the forest, Liriam found a narrow path marked with stones and decided to follow it.

- If there is a route, it must lead somewhere.

After a couple of hours, Liriam heard something behind her that finished

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cheering her up completely: horse hooves approaching. Looking in the distance, there was a great cloud of dust approaching and a few minutes later she could finally see the horse and its rider. The horse was black and looked very strong. Liriam stood where she was, waiting for the rider to approach her. When the man got close enough to see her, and noticing the savage aspect of the princess, the rider steered his horse to take a path as far away as possible: Liriam, dirty and covered in blood as she was, with a huge bow on her back, was not a vision that inspired confidence.

When Liriam noticed the change in the man's attitude, she concentrated just a second on the beast. The pain that the horse must have felt made it lose its stability and it fell to the ground, along with its rider, who was shot forward off the saddle. The man fell to the ground violently, for he didn't expect such a reaction from his horse, but as soon as his body had touched the ground, he rose quickly and tried to lift his horse before the woman could approach him. The animal groaned in pain on the ground and, no matter how hard the rider pulled the reins, it did not get up. When the man looked back towards the road, Liriam was already at his side, watching him, curious.

- Where are you traveling in such a hurry, brave knight? - Liriam asked in a tone of false innocence. The wind blew her dark hair in all directions. The man gave up wanting to help his animal and stood up to speak to the princess, but not before drawing his sword.

- I'm going to the city of Bernaemal, if you are really asking because you want to know, my lady. - he answered seriously.

- My lady? - Liriam replied, surprised - How do you know that I am a "lady"? Maybe I'm a princess, or maybe a queen... Do you talk like that with all the women you meet, knight?

- No, my lady. I travel to Bernaemal. - the man answered raising his voice - are you going in the same direction?

- No... - Liriam replied.

- Well, then... will you let me go on my way?

- No...

The traveller looked at the floor for a long time with a frown before speaking again. When he did, his voice sounded different: sad, tired. It could be that

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Liriam was a woman and he was a courageous man, but Liriam's appearance left no doubt about her strength... The rider already knew what his destiny would be.

- You can take my horse and my belongings, if you wish.

- I don't want your belongings, but I will take your horse with pleasure, thank you very much.

- Do you need directions? I can help you find your way without problems. I know the area well; my father is an important merchant and...

- I know where I must go, you don't need you to tell me anything!

- Is there anything I can do, say, or offer to you... - said the rider, already in a tone of supplication - to make you change your mind?

- No...

The two stared in silence and, as time passed, Liriam's eyes were losing their colour just as it had happened with the wolves the night before. The rider, tired of waiting, took his sword and tried to attack Liriam with all his might. Liriam avoided the deadly attack without any difficulty, and then another blow and another and another. The man was a skilled warrior, but Liriam, unarmed as she was, far exceeded him.

Liriam never knew where the desire to kill the traveller came from, but once the man had attacked her, she was certain that that was what she wanted most in the world: "Follow your instincts".

Avoiding the attacks, the princess jumped back, turning in the air, rested her hands on the ground and, with the strength of her legs, kicked the traveller's neck breaking it with a single blow. When the man fell to the ground, he was already dead. Unhappy with that, Liriam jumped on top of him and continued hitting him, her blows getting stronger and faster. The frustrations of so many years, accumulated inside her were personified in the rider. Liriam wanted to get rid of those emotions forever. She began to cry profusely, while still hitting the man.

Once she got tired, Liriam wiped her sweat and tears, and then got on the horse, which while Liriam beat up whoever his master was, had risen and gone away at full speed. Liriam had no trouble reaching it and riding it, though. Now, she would get to Liriethem faster.

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- There is no time to waste!

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Returning to the world of the living

With the help of her new horse which, frightened by the presence of Liriam on his back, ran as fast as it could, the princess found, in less than a day of hurried march, a small port next to the river. Decided to get to the river as quickly as possible, Liriam urged the horse to gallop until the beast was exhausted. The animal was breathing hard and, once Liriam got out of it, it fell to the ground and did not rise again. Not so much out of pity, but “as a reward,” Liriam approached it and dealt a heavy blow in the middle of its chest, taking its life.

- I have given you the gift of death and peace. Enjoy it, dear friend.

The port was made of about four or five buildings next to the river, where people could eat and spend the night, and only about three docks to anchor the boats. The princess entered the port attracting great attention: All the situations she had experienced in recent days were directly impacting on her appearance. What surprised people the most was her look: her eyes had not completely lost the brightness they showed when she murdered the rider. No one dared to look at her straight in the face and just ran away from her, wherever she went. Liriam didn't care in the least.

Already at the docks, she chatted with several captains until she found a boat sailing towards Liriethem. Captain Bergn, who was an old man, hardened by the years at sea, looked sideways at Liriam, without hiding any of the doubts he had.

- We sail tomorrow morning, alright - he said to Liriam - but we don't take passengers... and least of all, women.

- I think you will change your mind, Captain... - Liriam said, as her eyes

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paled again.

- I don't see why I should do it. - The captain replied abruptly; after so many years dealing with rough sailors, he was not so easily frightened - We have an important cargo, we have the people we need to sail the boat... and we don't want any kind of problem.

- Too late for the latter...

The force of the princess's gaze forced the captain to lower his head, despite himself. It was as if an invisible hand was holding the back of his neck to keep him in that position.

Liriam looked at the ship's name: King Oril III. "How ironical!" she thought.

Then, watching the ship's sailors, who had not taken their eyes off her while she was talking with Bergn, she said:

- Diligent men, sailors of King Oril III, LISTEN TO ME! - The few who were not looking at her until then, came to hear what she had to say - Who is the second in command of this boat?

- What do you want to...? - Captain Bergn interrupted.

- Silence! I am asking you again, strong men of King Oril III... who is the second in command of this vessel?

A young man, clean-shaven and pale, stepped forward and raised his hand. He was not the kind of man Liriam expected. "If it weren't that I need these men to sail the ship for me..." Liriam thought. She looked at him for a few seconds like someone watching an insect and then, turning around and without warning, she hit Captain Bergn's chest with brutality. Her entire arm had stuck into the old sea lion, piercing it. Liriam withdrew her arm from inside the man's body with a little effort, spilling blood everywhere. Bergn's face was of surprise and pain at the same time. The captain took a step back, then another, stumbled and fell into the water. He was not seen again. The other men on the ship looked at the water and began preparing to rescue their captain.

- Forget him - said Liriam - he is dead. And you - pointing to the second in command of the "Oril III" - You are the new captain; congratulations. - she said without any emotion in her voice - And as such, Captain, I ask permission, very humbly, to board the ship and to have you take me to Liriethem - she

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said, slyly.

The man shook his head in all directions, probably meaning “yes”, but with little success.

As she boarded the ship, she locked herself in the captain’s cabin – “It’s not as if Bergn would need it anyway”, she thought – sat on the floor and leaned her back against the wall. She thought about the events that would take place when she arrived to the capital of the kingdom, and, observing the bow of Hydras, the gift that the spirits in Liamsa had given her, she thought: “I didn’t have the chance to use this useful present yet. Although... with certainty there will be no lack of opportunity.” She closed her eyes and fell asleep.

After the incident with Captain Bergn, the trip was quiet. The sailors made the stops they planned to do (after Liriam agreed to that), so the trip lasted what Captain Bergn had explained at first. Beyond that, no one tried to approach or annoy her and Liriam decided not to attract any more attention.

Although she had not left the city of Liriethem for too long, Liriam felt a sudden nostalgia when she saw the familiar landscape again and the typical smell of the capital in the air. Already at the port, Liriam slipped away from the ship in silence and quickly lost herself in the narrow streets of the capital. She didn’t bother to clean herself up, but she stole a long tunic from a store to cover herself a little.

Liriethem was at that time a thriving city and there was a lot of movement in the streets. The economy flourished and commerce in the city benefited all its citizens, who lived happily, so long their homes were warm and their bellies full.

- They are so busy, that they have already forgotten their beloved king, who was the one who made all this possible. They just continue with their miserable lives.

No one recognized the princess, so she could move without being disturbed until she reached the Heart of the Hydra, the royal chambers.

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The castle had large gardens, full of trees of different colours²⁰. The gardens were slightly guarded, so Liriam could slip away without problems.

When she stepped on the grass of the palace, Liriam recalled her previous life in the castle, but, above all, what the spirits of Liriethem spirits had told her. The statue king had ordered her: "You must go to Liriethem and return to the Heart of the Hydra. See with your new eyes and feel the world as one of us. You can see people's souls directly. You will know then who has a dark heart and quickly find the murderer."

Well, she was already in Liriethem and had reached the Heart of the Hydra. She had tested her new senses and her new abilities and felt ready. "Now I have to find someone with a dark heart, and I will have found my father's killer.", she thought. It was time to prove to the souls what she could do and prove to herself that she was a worthy daughter of her father.

The Heart of the Hydra was just as Liriam remembered. The walls were light blue, with plenty of huge windows and details everywhere: small golden statues from Liriethem's mythology; grey-painted drawings with shadows, to give it the effect that they were trying to get out of the walls themselves... and the dark blue roofs. The palace was an incredible sight, and Liriam watched it for a few minutes despite the urgency of her mission.

Liriam woke up from her contemplation when she heard voices behind her and quickly hid among trees to listen in: Two men were talking in whispers, but thanks to the hidden place she found, Liriam could hear everything they were saying. One was tall and bald, carrying a basket with fruit, "probably a servant of the castle." The other was short and thin, Liriam had seen him a couple of times before: he was the baker's assistant.

- Have you seen the princess today? - said the bald man - I felt like I would...
- Do what? - interrupted the short man, mocking - You could never even touch the princess.

Liriam wondered if they had seen her when she was entering the royal

²⁰ This had been done on purpose by the royal gardeners, so that with the change of the seasons the gardens would show different landscapes. It was said that the Heart of the Hydra could be visited every season and, each time, the visitor would see a different picture of the castle.

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gardens. She thought she had gone unnoticed, but maybe not...

- She was wearing a pink dress today... - the bald man continued, lost in his fantasies.

- She would never even look at you... - insisted the short one.

Liriam realized that they were talking about the other princess of Liriethem. "They are talking about Larem. The little man is right, my bald friend, my sister would never look twice at a man like you."

- ... because she just has eyes for me - continued the short man.

Liriam was surprised to hear those words. She no longer agreed with the man.

- What are you talking about? A beautiful woman like her can only belong to me and no one but me - continued the other servant.

- Well... we can always share her - the baker's assistance's eyes shone with malice.

- Share her? Mmm... yes, I don't see why not...

- Now that the king is dead, there is no one to protect the princesses.

- The princess, you mean. The other one disappeared months ago and nobody has seen her again... she went crazy when she saw her father dead and escaped from the Heart of the Hydra... or so the old women say.

"Months?" Liriam wondered, "How long have I been in Liamsa?"

- She was crazy before that anyway, if you ask me.

- But she was also very beautiful...

- If we find her, we can share her too!

- If she still lives... - said the first.

- If she still lives... - agreed the other.

- May Tiliais keep the king with the dead... and his daughters with us! - the two shouted at the same time, laughing out loud.

Liriam didn't think twice. She left her hiding place, not giving the two men enough time even to be surprised by her appearance. The two fell to the ground, dead, almost without realizing what was happening.

- I have to find the queen. Where the hell is my mother right now?

Liriam was already on her way to the royal gardens and headed towards a less frequented entrance to the Heart of the Hydra. There, she found two of

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her mother's maids: She only heard a few words, but she could understand that the queen was in the Tiliais Room²¹.

- What is my mother doing there? – the princess thought.

The Tiliais Room was a large hall; it showed the ancient and present glory of the kingdom, with paintings and sculptures about Liriethem's history on the walls and ceiling. All the details and ornaments in this room were golden, and there were also many mirrors that produced a visual effect of immensity to those who were in the middle of the room. Details of the most important events of Liriethem's history could be seen in every corner, from its foundation to the present day, with many scenes in which Tiliais interceded for the kingdom in the symbolic form of a beautiful warrior woman, who wore a pendant in the shape of a Hydra.

The Queen was sitting in Liriethem's Chair²² talking with different people: as it seemed, Irialis, Liriam's mother, was taking care of the affairs of the kingdom. This surprised the princess very much, since the queen had never been present at the hearings Oril III granted daily.

Liriam quietly entered the room and, since there were so many people, she had no trouble to stay around unnoticed. The princess came as close as possible to where her mother was, hidden among the nobles gathered there, so she could hear better what was going on.

Queen Irialis looked beautiful in a majestic grey dress. Strangely, she was not respecting the mourning colours for the death of a king and on her head she wore a fine crown, full of diamonds. Liriam had never seen her mother look so elegant and masterful.

- ... and then Meridam's men stole all my horses, your majesty. – a man was explaining to the whole court.

- Do you have any proof of what you say? – Queen Irialis asked, from the Chair of Liriethem.

²¹ The most important room in the Heart of the Hydra, which is where the king hears the problems of the subjects, makes decisions and speaks to the court.

²² Liriethem's Chair refers to the royal throne, in which only the sovereign can sit. Liriethem's Chair is the central theme of many stories.

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- I have no more horses now, that's for sure! - The whole court laughed at this comment.

- Silence! We cannot arrest the honourable Meridam simply because a peasant like yourself asks it. Meridam has helped this kingdom a lot, and if you don't have any clear evidence of what you are claiming...

- Meridam seems to help the queen in her bed more than he helps the kingdom itself! - shouted the man.

The entire court gasped.

- How dare you insult the queen!? Don't you know who you're talking to? Guards!

The royal guards went to meet the small farmer.

- This kind of thing didn't happen with Oril III! - shouted the man, while he was being put under arrest.

The queen jumped out of the Chair of Liriethem and met him to speak face to face. Queen Irialis was beautiful despite her age, but her face seemed made of iron.

- Now it is me who reigns over Liriethem... take him away!

The commotion slowly faded, the regent queen sat down again and continued to discuss other matters with the people in the room.

After several unimportant requests to the queen, and after several pointless discussions, Liriam decided that she had heard enough. She felt dark hearts everywhere in the court: ambition, lies, falsehood, selfishness... but, above all, a great unhappiness.

- Had the court always been like this? How did I never notice any of it? Was it my father who protected me from it, was he the one who prevented me from seeing things as they really were?

Liriam was beginning to feel sick: she was unable to explain what was happening to her, but she was sure something inside her was not right. With a little effort she managed to control these discomforts and decided to withdraw from the Tiliais Room and wait for her mother in her chamber: No one would bother them there and they would be able to discuss the important issues that had taken her there. Liriam wanted to know everything about her father's death and find out some information about Oril's past that only her mother

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could know. Any clue that could help her find the murderer...

“And ask her why she was so hard with the poor villager whose horses were stolen... what was wrong with her?”

On the labyrinthine road to the queen’s room, Liriam noticed that her sister Larem was walking in a nearby corridor and decided to meet her first.

Larem was a thin young woman with soft, feminine features. Contrary to Liriam who had dark, almost black hair, Larem’s hair was light brown, long to the waist. Her honey-coloured eyes were the envy of all the women of the court. At 18, Larem was undoubtedly the most beautiful woman in all of Liriethem.

- Larem! Wait! - Liriam shouted.

- Who are you? And... How did you get here...?

Seeing her like that, dirty, dishevelled and with her clothes in rags, Larem thought that she was a peasant who wanted to steal something from the palace. Only after a few seconds did she recognize her sister.

- Liriam... is that you? It’s you! Liriam! What happened to you? Where have you been? We were so worried about your disappearance for all this time; we thought the worst so many times! Mother sent to look for you many times as we knew that you should be somewhere. We never lost hope of seeing you again. - Larem stepped back and saw Liriam again from top to bottom - But... Are you alright? You look terrible! And that bow? I didn’t know you knew anything about archery... - she said, surprised.

Suddenly, Larem recovered a little from the surprise and her voice took a serious tone:

- Does our mother know that you have returned to the Heart of the Hydra?

- Which of all your questions do you want me to answer first? - Liriam said, laughing.

Larem also laughed and they hugged. It was a strong and fraternal hug; they both had tears in their eyes, Liriam realized then how much she had missed her sister.

Once they separated from the embrace, they went to the queen’s chambers and continued chatting. It was a spacious room, with several tables and many chairs. Liriam felt chills as she entered the room that, not so long ago, was

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also her father's, but she didn't let that thought make her sad. Her father, or what was left of him in this world, had given her a mission and was waiting for her.

- So, where have you been all this time? - Larem asked.

- I doubt you would believe me, even if I told you everything... I have had incredible "adventures", if I can describe them that way...

- You know you can trust me. I will believe you, whatever you say...

- It's not that I don't trust you, Larem... but the things that have happened to me are hard to believe for those who haven't seen them... and I don't want you to think that your sister has gone crazy... it's enough that only I think that.

- I understand... - Larem said, frowning.

- Don't be like that, it's not what you think... Why don't you tell me what has happened in the Heart of the Hydra since I "disappeared"? How has Liriethem been holding after the death of our father? How is our mother?

- Well, since... our father... abandoned us - explained Larem with difficulty - and partly due to your disappearance... not that I reproach you anything, of course; I understand everything that went through your head in those moments, but well... our mother has... well, she did it because there was no one to do it, of course, but, she named herself queen regent and has been governing Liriethem ever since... of course we needed to someone to rule, but...

- Calm down Larem... I know it has been a lot to assimilate, and I am terribly sorry if my actions have made the situation even worse. I should have stayed here with you and our mother. I have seen her in the Tiliais Room... executing her "royal justice" - said Liriam, trying to direct the conversation to other issues.

- I'm also a princess of Liriethem, Liriam. But our mother has not looked in my direction, not even for a second when we had to decide on the rule of the kingdom. - Larem continued, as if she had not listened to Liriam.

- If you expect someone to make the decision for you, Larem, perhaps you are not prepared to reign... - Liriam muttered to herself.

- What did you say? - Larem asked.

- Nothing, nothing... I just said, I think the way in which our mother is governing seems very strange.

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- You're acting weird... are you sure you're okay? Anyway... beyond having ignored me, our mother has been under a lot of pressure, especially since, when returning from Liamsa, you were nowhere to be found... the heiress to the throne missing! Of course, we had to keep up appearances, so as not to alarm the population. There were many rumours, nobody saw you during the funeral either... and, as our father said, "first of all, we have to think about Liriethem, then our wishes." - Larem said that in a tone that Liriam thought it was a bit accusing. Taking a long breath, Larem concluded - And that is why our mother decided to sit in the Chair of Liriethem... until you came back, or at least that was what she said... that the pressure of the circumstances forced her to do so.

- I can only imagine the pressure she's been through, but... I have seen how our mother declared a man a traitor just for defending his rights and the name of our father... I'm sorry, but the reaction of our mother seemed excessive and unfair. I don't think our father would have acted like this.

- I know what you mean. And it was not the first time: Our mother looks and acts like another person since we came back from Liamsa. I cannot explain it... but our father is no longer among us and this is the situation we have to face, Liriam. At least you're back now and we will not be alone anymore.

To this last comment Liriam remained silent. In her mind, her father had been the perfect monarch: kind, charitable and always putting the welfare of the kingdom first. She had to know if Larem had any information about their father's murder, but just when she was going to ask her about it, Queen Irialis entered the room. She stared at her incredulously for a few seconds, like someone who sees a ghost.

- Liriam? Is it you? - Queen Irialis asked, surprised.

- Yes, mother. It's me. - Liriam replied, a little cold.

- Oh, my daughter! Where have you been? - The queen went to her daughter and hugged her with tears in her eyes. Finally, Liriam returned the hug, leaving aside in her mind the scene she had witnessed in the Tiliais Room a few moments ago.

- I was sad about my father's departure and went to accompany him to his last abode. I'm so sorry I was so late coming back; I should have returned to

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Liriethem immediately ...

- Don't worry, Liriam, I understand. We are all still sad about Oril's departure. When someone we love so much leaves us, it is not easy to fill that gap that they leave in our lives. But life goes on...

- I guess so...

- Well, well... - Irialis said, recovering some of her composure. - I have a meeting with the royal guard now. As you well know, my daughters, Liriethem is not going to rule itself. But first... Larem, can I have a word with you?

- Sure, mother.

Only when the two women walked away and left Liriam alone in the room did she realize the discomfort she was feeling (even stronger this time than before).

- I am not going to tell anyone the things that I have seen or experienced. It would not help. And besides, the mission was entrusted only to me: I must focus on finding my father's killer. Any conversation with Larem or with my mother can wait. Argh... what is this pain? I need to continue; I can't stop now.

Finding the regicide was going to be more difficult than Liriam had thought: since she had returned to the Heart of the Hydra, her new senses felt strange; from the moment she stepped on the entrance of the castle, the princess had felt dark hearts in all directions.

- I have to calm down and sort my thoughts. If I concentrate, I will be able to find the person I'm looking for. There has to be someone who stands out from all others... the statue king said this would be simple... or so it seemed to me when he explained it.

At that moment, a man entered the room and interrupted her concentration. He was undoubtedly a soldier: tall, and you could tell that, under the silver armour that protected his entire body, he was robust. He had dark, very short hair and a beard of several days.

- Agalarem! What are you doing here? - Liriam jumped to meet the soldier and hugged him.

- Liriam! Then it is true what the queen said, that you live and that you have returned to the Heart of the Hydra! I was afraid something had happened to you or that you had done some madness because of your father's death.

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- You know me so well, Agalarem... maybe better than I know myself...

They both held each other for a long time without saying a word. Liriam was ashamed to have completely forgotten Agalarem during all this time but, with the death of her father, everything in her life as a princess had been relieved to a second place. Even love...

- It feels like an eternity when we last saw one another, that the time we spent together was in another life... - said the princess.

- I feel the same. I thought it was the last time I was seeing you when you left with the Tilianist monks.

- So, you knew what I wanted to do?

- Of course.

- And even so, knowing what I would do, you let me go anyway? You didn't think that maybe I wouldn't come back?...

- I see now that leaving you alone was not a mistake. You look better than ever, other than dirty and with clothes all shattered, of course... I see a fire in your eyes that I had never seen before... and that bow... you look different... even dangerous! And yes, I let you go, of course: it was not my place to say anything. Besides, if it was your will, I didn't want to get in the way.

- My will is another one right now...

Liriam tried to kiss him, but the soldier looked away, avoiding the kiss, and moved a little away from Liriam. It was obvious that he was in conflict with himself, torn between what his heart dictated and what his position in the kingdom demanded.

- Princess, you know that this can't happen. - Agalarem's tone had changed, it was colder and more respectful; he walked two steps away from Liriam - Why hurt us even more?

- I know... I heard you every time you said it: me, a princess of Liriethem and heiress to the throne, and you, a "simple soldier"; isn't it? But I love...

- Don't finish that sentence, please, your majesty. We already know how it all ended last time: The queen forbade you to see me and my superiors punished me... severely. A soldier like me has no place in the life of a princess. We lead different lives. Besides, I don't want anything bad to happen to you; no one in the kingdom wishes that... - before saying this, Agalarem swallowed

THE CURSED SOULS OF LIRIETHEM

– you go away, crying, because a whim of yours was not pampered.

– Don't try to take all the credit, soldier – Liriam said angrily, almost spitting out the word "soldier" – My father, the king of Liriethem had died. I did not escape the Heart of the Hydra because of you.

They both remained silent, breathing wearily. Some words hurt more than a dagger.

– Let's change the subject, please... – Liriam said, regaining her composure a little – You were very close to my father, right?

– As close as any royal guard.

– What kind of man was he? Was he fair? Was he a good king to his people? To the queen? With his daughters? All this from your point of view, that is, that of a... soldier of the royal guard.

Agalarem thought for a moment before answering. His way of speaking was slow, deliberate, like someone trying to explain something to a child.

– I don't know why you ask me these things, princess. You are his daughter; you should know better than me what kind of person your father was.

– Of course... but I'm not asking you about my father; I ask you about King Oril III, monarch of Liriethem.

– Ok... I think I understand what you are asking. If you want to know my opinion, however irrelevant it may be, about how King Oril III was... well, yes, he was a righteous man and sacrificed many things for Liriethem. Good or bad, I'm no-one to judge. The world is not divided into good or bad, everyone lives in their circumstance, you know?

– Very philosophical of you – Liriam scoffed.

– I'm serious, Liriam... I mean, princess. Your father's destiny was to be king of Liriethem. As such, he was an intelligent person and always put the kingdom as a priority.

– Yes... that's my father, all right.

– I think that the progress and prosperity of the kingdom are clear proof that he fulfilled the goals that destiny had set for him, and I don't think he left this world regretting anything.

– Yes, well... I'm not so sure about that last bit. What would you say if I told you that, despite being a great king, Oril III was murdered?

RETURNING TO THE WORLD OF THE LIVING

- What? Why are you saying that? No. I wouldn't believe such a thing. First, for everything I just said: I don't know anyone who wanted to see him dead; who would want to kill King Oril III? And second, because the royal guard was always present, wherever the king went. The same is now with the queen. It is our duty to protect the monarchs, with our lives if necessary!

- Well, then someone didn't do their job very well: I am sure that Oril III was murdered.

- I know it was a great loss... very difficult for the whole kingdom and especially for you, princess. But it is part of life, and I think the suffering is making you see things that do not exist, and enemies where there are none...

- He was murdered! King Oril III was assassinated! - Liriam shouted angrily.

- How can you be so sure? Has anyone seen anything? Has any killer confessed to anything? Where does that "certainty" come from, what evidence do you have?

Liriam could not simply answer "he told me so himself", because Agalarem would think she was completely crazy. So she was silent for a few seconds, sighed deeply, and decided to move the conversation to a safer subject.

- I guess you are right, it was very hard for me and I'm trying to find an answer that makes me feel better. You know me better than myself, I guess. But tell me more, please, Agalarem: You said my father was a fair king. Surely as a royal guard you saw things that nobody else saw.

- Yes, I have seen many things and I know of other stories the soldiers and captains of the guard have told me about. But I can't discuss them with anyone... not even with you Liriam, I'm sorry. My oath as Royal Guard keeps my mouth shut. - Agalarem said, slowly, turning red as he spoke.

- Thanks for nothing, then... - Liriam said and turned to leave.

- Wait! Do not go...

- What do you want?

- I am really sorry I couldn't help you, I really wish I could do something for you... but I'm a Liriethem soldier... I must do my duty...

- There is nothing you "can" say about those stories, isn't it? Well, no, wait... there is still one thing I would like to hear from you... and it is, if there is still space in your heart...

THE CURSED SOULS OF LIRIETHEM

- The answer is... - he sighed - no. You know it already...

- Then, there is definitely nothing you can say to help me. Do your duty and take good care of the queen, soldier. That's an order!

Liriam took several steps in the direction of the door, and suddenly stopped, stood still for a few seconds, as if thinking of something and finally turned around, ran towards Agalarem, jumped on him and, without the soldier being able to defend himself, she gave him a kiss. Agalarem did not resist. For a few seconds the world disappeared, and all the problems seemed unimportant. When they finally let go, Liriam prepared to leave Agalarem for good.

- This will be the last time we meet. Have a nice life, Agalarem, and goodbye!

- Liriam shouted.

Leaving Agalarem alone in the room²³, despite the pain she felt for the forbidden and unreciprocated love, the princess wasted no time with tears. She had a mission. And she had read between the lines and drew some interesting conclusions from the conversation with Agalarem.

- It has to be someone from the royal guard... or someone close to the king... which makes things even more difficult, since the murderer has to be someone from the Heart of the Hydra... where everyone has a dark heart. I feel like a blind man feeling the air around him, not being able to grab anything...

At that moment Liriam fell to the ground, as if she had been hit in the stomach. The pain she was feeling increased in waves until it became unbearable... it was the dark heart she was looking for, she felt her father's murderer nearby. Once again Liriam's eyes began to lose their pigmentation.

²³ Agalarem was extremely hurt after the conversation with Liriam. He loved her with all his soul, despite never having told her so. Once Liriam left, Agalarem knew that he could not stay in the Heart of the Hydra anymore and left the city of Liriethem almost immediately, which prevented him from witnessing the events that took place in the king's rooms moments later. He enlisted in the outpost army to fight in any war that the Liriethem army saw fit, far away from the capital, and from Liriam.

Death to the dark hearts!

It was the dark heart she was looking for. She could feel it: it was getting closer.

She started hearing voices in her head: "Oril III...", "...who could kill the queen...", "If I were the king...", "They are all bastards...". Liriam realized that the voices were the thoughts of the many people who were close by. Too many indeed... She couldn't concentrate on just one; all thoughts were full of hate against the Liriethem's royalty. Liriam ceased to be the princess she once was and transformed once more, just as she had done in the Liriethem Desert, in the messenger of the souls of Liamsa: Her eyes had already lost all pigmentation and her look was murderous. She went out to meet the people she had heard, or "felt", and prepared to fulfil her destiny.

The first ones she found were two soldiers who were resting and talking about the "convenient death" of Oril III. Liriam appeared in front of them and, without giving them any time to react, stole a sword from one of them at superhuman speed and, with two quick movements, both men were beheaded. Blood sprang profusely, staining Liriam once more. The heads rolled on the ground and the bodies stood for a few seconds before collapsing into a pool of blood. She tied the soldier's long sword around her waist, next to the bow: she was ready, but her task was far from being completed.

Next in line were two peasants whom were walking towards the exit of the Heart of the Hydra and whom had had lustful thoughts about Princess Larem. The first of them felt the cold iron of Liriam's sword pierce his back and saw it come out of his chest. The other man tried to run, but the princess reached him by cutting one of his legs. The man fell to the ground, screaming in pain,

THE CURSED SOULS OF LIRIETHEM

clutching to a leg that was no longer there. Liriam approached him slowly, with the sword in her hand, as the man screamed and asked for mercy, but the princess took the weapon with both hands and stuck it in the centre of the peasant's face. The sword stayed erected, Liriam did not bother to recover it.

No more screaming was heard, only the silence of death. The souls' messenger continued, immutable, with her task: it was for this that she had returned to the Heart of the Hydra, to carry on the slaughter of the dark hearts²⁴.

The royal guards were now on alert: they had seen the lacerated corpses on the floor and were looking for the bloodthirsty warrior who had the nerve to enter the king's castle, killing people for no apparent reason and with the violence of a beast. As Liriam advanced through the royal castle in search of that dark heart, blacker than all the others, a hundred soldiers were deployed to protect the royal family and the nobles of Liriethem.

She now reached a huge room, full of soldiers waiting for her. Liriam didn't wait for them and went on to take the offensive. As quickly as she had taken a single step forward, the men attacked her all at once. Covered in blood as she was, and nervous as they were about what the enemy could do, the royal soldiers wanted to attack first and ask questions later.

Liriam unfolded her bow and began shooting arrows of light in all directions; every time an arrow hit a soldier's body, it would explode, causing blood to burst profusely. If the arrow hit the head of any of the men, it was their end. When the soldiers got too close to her, since they were in large groups against Liriam, the princess used the bow itself to hit them and keep them at a distance.

Even though she had the powers of the souls flowing through her body, the soldiers were too many and Liriam was losing ground. Suddenly, three men attacked her at the same time with their long swords. Liriam could dodge the first man's attack, but the second one managed to touch her face with his sword, even if just barely, leaving a long red line of blood on her cheek. The

²⁴ "The slaughter of the dark hearts": it is said among the people of Liriethem that it was thanks to this massacre that the next generations of rulers were so good; for fear that the chosen one would return to Liriethem and purify its rulers once more.

DEATH TO THE DARK HEARTS!

third sword hit fully in her right shoulder.

Liriam shouted in pain as she felt the blow but, without losing consciousness, she jumped back to escape even more attacks. She could not die here, she had a mission, she could not disappoint her father. Her shoulder was bleeding a lot, and, suddenly, she began to feel a very strong heat in her body. She knew what it meant: She looked at the men who had once defended her, as the Liriethem princess that she was, but were now preparing to attack her again and muttered a low "I'm sorry". Then, Liriam shouted again with all her might, her body bursting with energy, and burning all the men in the room. When the soldiers realized what was happening, they tried to flee, but Liriam's roar seemed endless, and it reached everyone. When Liriam opened her eyes, any hostility, or movement, had completely ceased. She could continue.

Despite having ended the lives of so many people with a dark heart, Liriam knew that her father's murderer was not among them.

- My father's kingdom still has an enemy... his murderer. I have to find him.

Liriam's steps took her to her mother's chambers. When she opened the door, she saw her mother sitting on the floor, surrounded by royal guards. She was talking non-stop, clearly nervous and scared.

The fire she had felt in Liamsa had returned to her being more intensely than ever: Liriam looked directly into her mother's eyes and only saw hatred... for Oril III.

That's why she had felt so bad before; it was because of her mother's presence! Now that she had been able to better identify her feelings, she knew that she had found whom she was looking for. Liriam's anger was heard throughout the Heart of the Hydra.

The princess took the bow that the spirits had given her and tensed it, forgetting all the pain in her injured shoulder. A beam of light emerged from the tip of the weapon, which she aimed and shot at the soldiers protecting her mother, shouting at the top of her voice as she did it. The arrows hit them, one by one, going through armour, clothing and flesh alike and mortally wounding them.

A more experienced guard who had managed to dodge the first attacks, hiding behind the other soldiers, recovered his spear and attacked Liriam,

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leaving a deep wound on her face. The chosen by the souls lost her patience and, throwing a blow with her outstretched hand, broke spear and bone as if her hand was a sharp sword. The man fell to the ground, screaming in pain. Filled with fear, he crawled pitifully with his remaining forces to get away from Liriam. She didn't care: now she only had her mother in mind. As far as she was concerned, the dying soldier could crawl all he wanted.

- What have you done? WHAT HAVE YOU DONE? HOW... WHY DID YOU KILL THE GUARDS? - the queen shouted, completely out of herself, slowly moving away from Liriam.

- WHY DID YOU KILL THE KING? - Liriam replied, screaming even louder.

Without the queen being able to say a word, Liriam struck her in the stomach with all her strength, knocking her down; then, she lifted her, grabbing her by the neck and crushing her against the wall. Irialis' mouth was bleeding and trembling with fear.

- WHY DID YOU KILL MY FATHER? - Liriam shouted again.

Another blow, this time to the face, caused the queen to fall to the ground once more. Without hesitating for a second, Liriam took one of the swords laying around and pierced her mother's chest with it, careful not to pierce her heart: Liriam wanted to hear her confession before she died.

Coughing up blood and with eyes wide and full of tears, the queen looked straight at Liriam and spoke to her. Though she sounded sad, she accepted her destiny: She knew what awaited her and that these would be her last words.

- I can't say that I didn't expect this ending. After all, you were always more Oril's than mine. Do you want to hear my truth? Oril didn't love me... you can't know what it feels like... he loved another. I never knew who she was, or how and where he met her, because he never told me anything about her - but he even had a daughter with that woman. Do not be surprised, she lives here in the palace and you have called her "sister" all your life. The woman said that the king had raped her to hide the shame of having a bastard son; but "the king" took the girl in his care and brought her to Liriethem, to the Heart of the Hydra. I guess the woman is dead now, but I don't know, I don't care... and I guess it's too late for any of it now, anyway. From that moment on, I hated Oril and everything that had to do with him, I don't deny it: I thought about

DEATH TO THE DARK HEARTS!

killing him so many times that I can't count them anymore... The two had to die. I've only ever loved you, my princess of Liriethem, but nothing worked out the way I wanted to, and everything ended badly. My hatred consumed me... - The queen took in her last breaths of life and hugged Liriam, who was nearby, listening to her words. - But I didn't kill him... I swear...

Liriam felt her cheeks wet. She was crying. Had she heard correctly? The queen was not the murderer. Would she lie?

- But it cannot be. I'm sure I felt my father's murderer in my mother's dark heart. Were the Liriethem's spirits wrong about me? I just killed the wrong person. My own mother... my mother... who hated my father, yes, but it wasn't she who killed him. What have I done? How am I going to live with this guilt?

At that moment, Larem appeared in the room, watching the bloody spectacle from the threshold of the door. The dying soldier was still crawling, groaning in pain. Everything else was death.

- What happened here? - Larem asked.

- Larem... I hope you are a worthy queen Liriethem...

- What are you talking about, Liriam?

- I will disappear from this world.

- What? What are you talking about? But... you just returned. What are you thinking of doing?

- Our parents no longer live, and it is largely because of me. And my life doesn't belong to me anymore... I must leave Liriethem. This is no longer my place.

- Do not say that...

Liriam looked at her sister for a few moments, in silence. Her eyes looked like grey swirls that turned slowly: She had never seen her sister that way, she looked like another person.

Larem said nothing, just smiled. Her face had nothing of the sweetness and innocence of the beloved sister that Liriam had always known.

- He took me away from my mother... - Larem started saying, suddenly -

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he forced her²⁵, he took her life and deprived me of meeting her... the “king”... the “dear” king Oril III of Liriethem, my father. I learned the truth only a short time ago... and, when I learnt about this, I knew I had no choice... I had to kill him. And it was so easy: poison. Could you believe it? He drank it all, without doubting of me for a second... and never woke up again.

Larem’s whispers didn’t even made Liriam blink: she was, after all, the chosen by the spirits of Liriethem. It was her duty to kill Larem for what she had done. She had promised that she would become the tool of their designs. However, she did not dare to move. She stood still, watching her sister smile at her.

Liriam knew well that she could not do anything, the pain of being wrong with her mother still weighed too much on her. The effects that she experienced when becoming the chosen one of the souls disappeared immediately: Her eyes returned to their usual colour, and she stopped emanating energy from her being. Liriam even seemed to shrink.

Without looking back once, she went out the door and walked away from the room where her mother’s body lay next to those of the royal guard. Liriam had her mind completely blank, as if she were in a trance. She left the Heart of the Hydra, leaving Liriethem to never return.

Full of curiosity, Larem watched her leave, but said nothing. When she was alone in the room, Larem blinked once... twice... several times... faster and faster. Then she stared at the air, static for a few seconds until she finally came back to herself. When she noticed the grotesque scene around her, she began to yell.

²⁵ Many theories support the possibility that Tim was Larem’s uncle. They are based on the similarities of their stories. There are no records confirming this theory.

The secret of the king statue

Liriam's feet steered her way from then onward, leading her to wander without direction across different parts of the kingdom for almost three years. In all that time, she barely spoke with anybody and, to avoid having to do so, she moved frequently, forcing herself to simply forget everything. She had some casual encounters, but they were strange and forgettable. She walked almost all day and slept the rest of the time. She led an austere life, always sleeping outdoors, eating frugally, not caring too much about what was happening around her.

After being so long in this self-inflicted exile, her body took her once again to the mountain chain of Liath, only this time much further south of Liamsa. The roads in these mountains were very difficult and Liriam was barely looking where she was stepping, hindered in the mental lethargy in which she was. When walking around one day, she tripped over some cracks on the ground that were hidden among some rocks and fell into a hole. Her face showed no emotion, neither when tripping nor when falling. After a fall of several meters she felt cold water around her: She had fallen into a lake. It was not the same lake where Liriam had extinguished her internal fire, since this one had clear water and had no islands, but the water felt just as fresh.

The contact with the water woke her up a little. She swam to the shore of the lake, more by instinct than by will, and when ashore, she saw that there were large stones on the ground. "A cemetery". It had no resemblance to Liamsa's greatness, only some formless rocks to mark that bodies were underground.

- They had to make sure of your skill, that you were prepared to protect them... the spirits had to make sure of it -

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The voice that came behind her was unmistakable: her father. She turned around and there he was: the soul of Oril III. She wanted to tell him so much, but words didn't come easy to her. She spoke slowly and with difficulty: it was difficult to articulate a full sentence after spending such a long time wandering and avoiding contact with other people.

- Father!... What... are you doing... here? To see you... again... again, it makes me... happy... but... what did they have to... check.... the spirits?

- You offered your life...

- Father... I've killed... so many... people! I felt... dark hearts... everywhere... and I only did what... the spirits... asked me to do, I followed those new instincts... but... I stopped being... myself, to transform... into someone I am not... - Liriam exclaimed, remembering everything that happened in the Heart of the Hydra, and began to cry. Three years had not been able to help her forget the pain.

- Death is arbitrary, but it is also fair. Everybody dies; it is a law to which no one can escape. Men always think that they will live forever, but they lie to themselves. Our time is limited and we cannot control it. Something you should have known and have now learned with this hard experience is that no single soul is completely pure.

- Men with families, women who... were probably mothers, sisters... - Liriam continued sobbing.

- As I said, death is fair. But the consequences are beyond our power. Your sister rules Liriethem now, after you left the Heart of the Hydra, and the court is faithful to her... and, thanks to you, there is no one with a corrupt heart. She will be a queen like there never was in the history of Liriethem.

- But it was she who... killed you, father!

- I will not deny that I did not expect that from Larem, my... secret daughter.
- There was some discomfort in Oril's voice when talking about this topic - I welcomed her and made her part of my life; and how many problems it brought me! You know the whole story now; I have nothing to hide from you. But you see, I didn't have a pure heart either: I committed my faults... but I tried my best to do good, and now I find myself where you see me.

- And the queen? And my mother? I killed her... and she hadn't... done

THE SECRET OF THE KING STATUE

anything... How can I continue... living? – Liriam looked around, hoping to find her.

– No, Liriam. She is not here. Irialis is not of Liriethem blood.

– It was Larem... – Liriam continued – it was Larem... who murdered you... why didn't you tell me? I let her live... the very person... who I set out to eliminate... from this earth. She was the only one... I couldn't do anything to. I walked away... and let her live! – Liriam cried louder.

– Good people don't live forever, as everyone would like to. And bad people never die as quickly as they should... Life is just like that. Sorry, I know that this explanation won't bring you any peace, but don't worry... in the end, we will all meet the same ending. Except you... you will watch over the souls of Liriethem forever. Find your place, walk wherever you want, may your path extend itself as much as you want... but always make of Liamsa your ultimate destination. The spirits of Liriethem have seen what you are capable of and are waiting for you.

Liriam began to move away from the cemetery with slow steps. But, before she left, she turned around and looked once more at her father.

– Will we see each other again? – she asked.

– Always – Oril III said, smiling.

Oril III stayed behind, at the cemetery, staring at the floor. Suddenly, a figure emerged from the shadows and approached him until it was facing the old, dead king.

– Did she notice anything? – asked the soul of the statue king.

– Nothing. – Oril III replied – We played with all her senses and she didn't notice anything. Such an innocent soul... she believed absolutely everything we said, without ever questioning a word... I feel terrible.

Then he was silent for a few moments and sentenced:

– She ended the life of Irialis...

– Yes... as we expected she would.

– Liriam was looking for her here...

– We must make sure that they do not meet, at least not for the time being... second cousin of yours, right?

– Yes... as Liriethem as you or me.

THE CURSED SOULS OF LIRIETHM

- I think we should have known that a woman whose honour was insulted would never forget it! She hated you until the last second of her life... if she only knew...

- And Larem? - Oril interrupted with a lost look, barely hearing what the statue king was saying. - Will she be all right, all by herself?

- She won't have any problem, Oril. She lived traumatic moments, sure, but she will be fine. She has been doing great for these last three years, there's no reason to believe that it will change. Over time, this whole thing will be no more than a bad dream for her. The court supports her, and the Lirithem massacre is still present in the minds of almost everyone in the Heart of the Hydra... they will behave.

- But all the things she saw? The death of Irialis...

- She will think what everyone else does... that some murderer ended the life of the queen. I have manipulated Larem's mind to make Liriam disappear from her memories. Besides her, anyone who has seen our chosen one carrying through our justice at the Heart of the Hydra is dead now, so everyone continues to believe that she was lost forever during your funeral.²⁶ Everything will be fine...

- Your words sooth me.

- Glad to hear that you still believe in my words - replied the statue king, smiling.

- Just one more question...

- I know what you want to ask me... Liriam couldn't kill Larem, because she doesn't have a dark heart. It was I who made the decision for her to take your life. It was her body, but it was my will. She would never have done any of that by herself. Larem still has her soul clean... if it were not so, she would no longer be among the living.

- I guess so...

- Your sacrifice was worth it, Oril. Larem will be a great ruler and we must think of what's best for the kingdom, even if that involves seating new rulers

²⁶ They forget Agalarem and the dying soldier who was able to escape from the Lirithem massacre. What happened to both of them is part of other stories.

THE SECRET OF THE KING STATUE

on the Liriethem throne. And besides... we needed Liriam to become one of us.

- I guess so... - repeated Oril III, lost in his thoughts.

- We must be prepared for the difficult times ahead. The spirits of Liriethem will play an important role in the upcoming events.

- It still hurts that we lied so much to Liriam. You heard her! She continues to believe that it was Larem who...

- Let her believe what she wants to believe!... As long as she stays with us. We must prepare her. Don't misunderstand me, Oril, I'm really sorry for her and for the role she will play. I'm really sorry for all my descendants...

- When she finds out, she won't forgive us... she won't forgive me.

- What is it that she won't forgive? That Larem, being under our control, never had a dark heart, and didn't know what she was doing when she murdered you? - The statue king asked in a mocking tone.

- Yes...

- Or that we sent her to fulfil a mission that we knew from the very beginning that she would fail? - The king continued to use that sarcastic tone.

- That as well...

- Mmm... I know! That we gave her our strength in order to have her mother killed and leave the kingdom in more capable hands. Is that it?

- You know that this is not true. It was not because of that! Larem is not my daughter, she is not Liriethem. With her a new government begins, a new dynasty... a new blood. With her the curse of the souls of Liriethem will end... your curse!

- Ahh, you had to get personal with me at the end.

- I had to sacrifice everything I had because of you... my love, my family, my kingdom... for you... for Liriethem. I have HELPED YOU eradicate all the members of my family.

- And I'll be eternally grateful, Oril. And so will the kingdom. I know you are paying for my mistakes and I'm really sorry, I really am. It is not the kind of inheritance that I would have liked to leave to my kin. But we will fix everything when the time comes; when everything is over...

- Yes... - Oril said, understanding the change of subject of the statue king- I know Liriam... she will play her role in this coming battle. And, as for Tiliais, I

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hope she saves Liriethem.

- I hope so too, my friend... I hope so too.

The two kings stepped into the shadows and disappeared into the darkness.

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Appendix

Characters:

Oril III: deceased king of Liriethem.

Liriam Liriethem: daughter of Oril III and Irialis, heiress to the throne, and chosen by the spirits of Liamsa to defeat their enemies.

Larem Liriethem: daughter of Oril III and Irialis, sister of Liriam.

Irialis: Queen of Liriethem.

Mirt: grave robber, member of a secret brotherhood.

Tim: grave robber, member of a secret brotherhood.

Otis: grave robber, member of a secret brotherhood.

Bergn: captain of a boat.

Meridam: nobleman of Liriethem.

King statue: former king of Liriethem.

Liriam I: Former queen of Liriethem, called "the fertile".

Agalarem: royal guard and Liriam's love interest.

Liriethem I: former king of Liriethem.

Liriethem II: former king of Liriethem.

Doral IV: former king of Liriethem.

Doral V: former king of Liriethem.

Orolei II: former king of Liriethem, called "the desired."

Liriato: former king of Liriethem, called "the poor."

Bernaemal rider: man killed by Liriam on her way back to the city of Liriethem.

Tiliais: Hydra god of the legend.

Places:

Liriethem: Kingdom and city with the same name.

Liamsa: historic city, mausoleum of the royal family of Liriethem.

Bernaemal: city to which a rider was going before he was murdered by Liriam.

Heart of the Hydra: Royal apartments in Liriethem.

Liath: mountain where Liamsa is located.

The tomb of the eternal kings / the chamber of the lone king: room where the souls of Liriethem dwell.

Liriethem Desert: wilderness around Liamsa.

Doral River: river that has the name of a former king of Liriethem.

Tiliais room: place where the ruler of the kingdom of Liriethem makes decisions and listens to his subjects.

Liriethem chair: royal throne of the kingdom of Liriethem.

The ten statues of Liriethem: famous statues of the ten greatest kings of Liriethem.

Others:

Tilianism: religion that believes in Tiliais, the Hydra God, and that interprets the text of the myth of the Dragon and the Hydra in such a way, that the Hydra is the winner of their fight.

Baharism: religion that interprets the text of the myth of the Dragon and Hydra in a different way, believing in the victory of the Dragon.

Liriethem style: architectural style typical of the Liriethem area.

The brotherhood: rebel group of people who were against the king and the royalty of Liriethem. Its organization or objectives are not mentioned in this story.

The war of the brothers: name given to the civil war of Liriethem that forced the kings at the time to stop the repairs of Liamsa.

About the Author

GG Klimt is an Argentine – German author.

Having lived in several countries throughout his life, GG Klimt fluently masters a few

languages, which allows him to personally deal with the translations of his works. It is

for this reason that it is most likely that a translation of existing material will be

published first, instead of new books. GG Klimt loves foreign languages and to see his

work in different languages is his passion.

GG Klimt lives in Frankfurt am Main, in Germany, where he has a common job, and does not devote himself fully to literature, even if that is his great desire.

What can be expected in the future? The translation of the work “The souls of Liriethem” into more languages, hopefully. On top of that, GG Klimt is working on three other books: the first, a second compilation of short stories; the second, a fantastical story about an immortal who hunts dragons seeking revenge; and, finally, the story of Catharctul, powerful being capable of destroying kingdoms. The continuation of “The souls of Liriethem” is also planned.

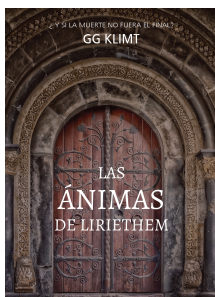
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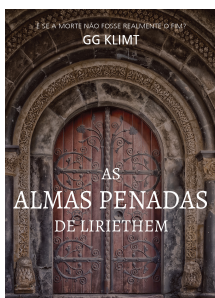
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Also by GG Klimt



Las Ánimas de Liriethem



As Almas Penadas de Liriethem



De Nuestros Demónios